

**PAGES MISSING  
IN THE BOOK**

**THERE IS VERY LITTLE  
MARGIN BETWEEN THE LEFT  
AND RIGHT PAGES**



252

N56

Newton  
Things I know in  
religion. 36)  
A. A. N.

252 N56

## Keep Your Card in This Pocket

Books will be issued only on presentation of proper library cards.

Unless labeled otherwise, books may be retained for four weeks. Borrowers finding books marked, defaced or mutilated are expected to report same at library desk; otherwise the last borrower will be held responsible for all imperfections discovered.

The card holder is responsible for all books drawn on his card.

Penalty for over-due books 2c a day plus cost of notices.

Lost cards and change of residence must be reported promptly.



**PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
**Kansas City, Mo.**

## Keep Your Card in this Pocket

KANSAS CITY, MO PUBLIC LIBRARY





# Things I Know in Religion





# THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

A Preface to Faith

BY

JOSEPH FORT NEWTON



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS  
NEW YORK AND LONDON

THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION  
Copyright, 1930, by Harper &  
Brothers—Printed in the U. S. A.

FIRST EDITION

I-E



To  
FREDERICK W. NORWOOD  
My Beloved Successor in the  
Pulpit of the City Temple  
With Admiration and  
Affection





## CONTENTS

THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION	i
WHY WE BELIEVE	21
GOD OUR ETERNAL REFUGE	43
WHEN GOD IS NEAR	57
THE CRISIS OF CHRIST	67
THE RETURN TO THE ALTAR	85
RELIGION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS	103
OUR NEIGHBOR	119
THE NEXT STEP IN RELIGION	135
WHEN CHRISTMAS COMES	147
THE CHALLENGE OF LENT	161
THE IMMORTAL LIFE	175



## FOREWORD



F THE SERMONS HERE SELECTED, ONE APPEARED in the *Atlantic Monthly* and two in *The Christian Century*, while the title sermon formed a part of a symposium entitled *What Religion Means to Me*, edited by Sherwood Eddy, who kindly allows me to use it. The first two sermons have been used effectively in various colleges and universities—Harvard, Columbia, Princeton, Iowa, Vassar—in chapel services and group discussions. The underlying emphasis all through is an appeal to experience, as over against outward authority and arid argument, as the basis of faith, seeking the roots of religion in the nature and need of man, and its fulfillment and verification in the struggles we pass through in fellowship with God and our fellows.

J. F. N.

St. James's Church,  
Philadelphia.



# Things I Know in Religion





## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

*Now I know in part; but then shall  
I know even as also I am known.*

—*1 Cor. 13:12.*



T. PAUL DID NOT PROFESS TO KNOW EVERYTHING. IN REGARD TO MANY THINGS OF VAST IMPORT HE HAD HONESTLY TO ADMIT that he did not know. He saw in a glass darkly, he prophesied in fragments. That is to say, respecting much that he deeply desired to know, he was a Christian agnostic, as we all must be. Our human mind is limited, our vision is dim. On this bank and shoal of time we can see but a little way ahead, and every ray of light is tipped with darkness.

There was a time in the life of St. Paul when he knew much more than he did when he wrote this Hymn of Love; a time when he knew more and loved less. Like some of the rest of us, St. Paul had been trained in a system of theology in which little was left unknown. His teachers knew the nature of God, the names and number of the angels, and the end of all things. As often happens, his knowledge made him narrow, bigoted, and intolerant, as if it were not sure of itself. Uncertainty lies at the heart of all intolerance, doubt is the basis of bigotry. Happily, an explosive ex-

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

perience had blown the old theology of St. Paul to bits, leaving his house of dogma an utter and hopeless wreck. He was never able to pick up the pieces and put them together again.

Nor did he care to do so. Old things had passed away; all things had become new. Something strange and wonderful had happened, defying analysis and baffling speech. Life had now another basis, a deeper meaning, and a new dynamic. He himself was "a new creation," as he tells us, living in a new world of lengthening vistas and lifting skies. If he knew less and loved more, finding in love the way to the truth most worth knowing, the things he now knew were far more vital and profound than the dogmas of other days. He humbly admitted that he knew only in part, perhaps a tiny part, but his knowledge was not only more real as far as it went, but, somehow, more vivid and satisfying. If he still had a habit of trying to prove by logic what he had learned by love, it was hardly more than a habit. His argument always ended in an anthem, and often in an ecstasy of joy.

A Christian saint here used the same word that a modern agnostic uses, albeit with a different accent and emphasis. Much depends upon the tone of voice and heart in which we say that we do not know. It may be said in a tone of sad finality, if not dogmatic denial, implying that there is nothing to know, and that we are doomed to perpetual spiritual idiocy. Such an attitude was alien to the mind of St. Paul, who was neither negative nor neutral, as so many are today. The issues involved were too profound, too far-reaching. One can-

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

not think of St. Paul singing the plaintive minor music of our time, half query and half protest. Never! His music was akin to that high, heroic, lonely voice echoing across the ages, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," flinging out his faith in the teeth of tragedy. As he himself said elsewhere, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have deposited with him." In other words, he thought expectantly, as one who knew that there is always truth ahead, more truth to be known, truth more amazing than we have yet imagined.

Such should be our attitude today, in the midst of the amazing advance of knowledge; and it would be but for the extraordinary spiritual inferiority complex which afflicts us. How strange that the human mind, in the very hour of its triumph, should be smitten with spiritual paralysis, ending in obfuscation, as if bludgeoned by bulk and suffocated by size. Surely the mind capable of the scientific discoveries of our generation is not untrustworthy in its spiritual adventures—the soul of Jesus is surely as much to be trusted as the revelations of a test tube! It is obviously more difficult for one who *begins* to believe today than it was for one whose faith was matured in the tiny, cozy, more friendly universe in which some of us grew up, before science had pushed the walls of the world back out of sight and taken the roof off. But that is only temporary, and asks for a more thrilling adventure. For the moment the old religious charities are blurred, but the realities remain, and the mist will lift revealing a greater faith.

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

In the meantime there is confusion, and inevitably so, because our religious insight has not adjusted itself to the new universe which science has unveiled. Nor has science, for that matter—it is dumb and amazed as its basic ideas are analyzed and found to be only symbols and shadows. They err who imagine that science is all fact and religion all faith. At bottom all our thinking rests upon faith—faith in the reality of truth, faith in the power of the mind to reach the truth; and what is learned by faith becomes, in turn, the basis of further faith. It is a paradox but not a contradiction, since faith and fact mingle in our quest of truth in every field. Faith is “reason grown courageous”; and facts point the direction in which faith flies. The truth is that both science and religion have become more modest, each finding that it needs the other—the one to find facts, the other to find meanings. Hence my desire to tell not what I believe, but what I know in religion, the facts upon which my beliefs are based and built, and may have to be rebuilt. If I tell it as a personal experience, it is because that is what it is.

### I

Here we are in an amazing universe, alive, active, thinking, dreaming, loving, seeking to know the meaning of the world and our place and duty in it. Manifestly, then, if there is any key to the riddle it must be found in something within ourselves, since we cannot leap outside ourselves to discover it. Nor do we need to do so, because we are within nature, not op-

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

posed to it but a part of it. Man is not an alien in the universe but a child, not exotic but indigenous; and this means that in values, as in consciousness, we are on the inside, and have in our own nature a clue to its meaning. Nay, more; we are agents, actors, participants in the actual life of the universe, not mere spectators of reality but part of it—part of “the thing-in-itself,” as the philosophers say. Since this is so, what is part and parcel of ourselves is unassailable by any uncertainty, and to the measure of our capacity we can know what the universe is by what it is in us and to us.

By the same token, if there is a spiritual element in man, which no one denies, it must have come from the universe itself, if not from physical nature then from some Power behind and within physical nature, else it would not be in man. Also, the spiritual quality, so to name it, must be greater in the universe than in man, since its development in man is still so incomplete. Here, truly, is a firm basis of faith, built into the very structure of our being, and *the first fact upon which I build is the moral sense in man*. Here it is, rooted in the very bottom of our being, interpret it as you like—an impulse, an insight, an inner censor, an awful whisper of command—as much a part of the universe as pig iron or potash; something which has never accepted utter identification with outer force or brute fact. At the core of consciousness is conscience, a sense of right and wrong, an inexorable demand for obedience to an inner law. If it be only an agnostic resignation to ~~an~~ inner decency, it is here within us, unmistakably so. Like everything else, it may vary with

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

race, custom, depth of insight and degree of development, but it is a fact of nature and life. The mystery of man is not that he does wrong, but that he is aware of it. Somehow, no one knows how—though one may have beliefs about it—man is aware that he is made for righteousness, and that he can never be a man, much less a happy man, until he is a righteous man.

The two overwhelming mysteries, as Kant said, are the still depth of a starlit sky and the silent whisper of the moral law in the soul of man; and one is as real as the other. Explain the moral life of man how you will, describe it as infantile inhibition of humanity, as the fashion now is; declare it to be only an echo within us of an old ancestral memory, or the shadow of an ancient fear—that is only to push the mystery further back and deeper down. The origin of the moral life, the initial bias toward righteousness remains to be accounted for. There is in man what Woolman called “a stop in the mind,” something which arrests us and compels us to pass moral judgment upon our thoughts and acts. It is here within me, unaccountably. I did not create it. Whether I can destroy it or not I do not know. It commands me, whether I will or no. When I obey it, I am happy; when I disobey it, I am thwarting my own nature and defying the law of my very being. To explain it away is not to send it away. If I drive it out the door, it comes in at the window and issues its edict.

Upon this fact, then, we may build, as Robertson did when, as a young man, sorely troubled about his faith and the meaning of his life, he went to the Alps to fight it out. The only thing which the analysis could not

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

dissolve and destroy was the moral law within, and so, "clinging obstinately to moral good," in spite of himself, he built upon that firm basis the edifice of his faith. As he put it picturesquely: if vice should lead to some white heaven, and virtue plunge us into some red hell, still virtue is better than vice, and honor is nobler than dishonor. Something deep in us, profound beyond our ken, answers, "Yes, it is true." Of course, if so much is true, much more must be true about ourselves and the universe; but I am dealing only with what I know, not with the details of belief. At any rate, conscience is the corner-stone of theology, the basis and beginning of any belief worth holding; the fact upon which and about which we may organize our faith.

## II

The second thing that I know is no less sure; it is that *I have the power to choose what is right and to refuse what is wrong*, or, contrariwise, to choose the wrong and refuse the right. Having done both, I know that it is true. At once we are faced by a vague fatalistic philosophy now in vogue, albeit hoary with age, which tells us that we are no more responsible for what we do than we are for the shape of our heads and the color of our eyes. No doubt it is plausible and many facts may be arrayed in its behalf; but every man knows that it is false. When Dr. Johnson had heard all the facts in favor of fatalism, he brought his old cane down with a thump and said: "I know I am free, and that is the end of it."

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

Fate is a fact, and so is freedom. Much of our life is ordered for us by fate, and runs in grooves which it must follow; most of it is fixed before we arrive. The time and place of our birth, our race, nationality, parentage, color, constitution, early environment—all are arranged without our knowledge or desire. Hands cold and dead seem to shape our lives from the grave. Tethered alike by nature and history, and inured to our bondage, we are not aware how beset we are until we awake to the facts. Still, as Emerson asks, if Fate is all, who and what is it that pries into the facts? Even limitation has its limits, and it is the fate of man to be free. Hedged about, restricted, enmeshed in a network of laws, his liberty is none the less real because it is limited, as it must be of necessity by the fact that he is finite, as well as by the nature and purpose of his life.

Just the same, as Tennyson said, if we are birds in a cage, we decide whether we are to sit on the upper perch or the lower. If Fate is supreme, then there must be a Higher Fatalism which includes moral law and the quest of truth, obedience to which sets us free. Or perhaps we may say that the will of man is free in that it is not *compelled*, but limited in the sense that it is *impelled* by the law of its own being, as well as by the pervasive and ultimately persuasive influence of the good, which is stronger than evil. However we explain it, surely a limited liberty is better by far than the slavery of a fetterless freedom. One often thinks of the words of St. Theresa when she wished for a torch and a bucket of water. With one she would burn up heaven and with the other put out the fires of hell, in order

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

that man might choose the good because it is good, and reject evil because it is evil.

Any sort of liberty is a danger, and may be a disaster. Huxley said he was quite willing to be an automaton, if he could be wound up and set going, assured that he would always do right; it would make life more simple. Happily, it is impossible. Man is not a machine, he is an organism; a moral being who must take the risk and peril of liberty, winning a good character or losing it, falling to rise, often baffled but still fighting on. Every man knows it is true; it is a fact given us by life and our own souls attest it. The record of human experience, as far back as we can go, confirms the reality and peril of the moral life, its glory and its pathos. Whole civilizations have "withered into tired dust" because they did not obey the moral law, turning life into a form of death.

### III

Even the moral life, with its awful law and its perilous liberty, is not all that we find within these "little, infinite human souls." There is something else; something elusive, ineluctable, irresistible, unconscious oft, unsatisfied ever; something free and flaming—a *motion and a passion that runs beyond duty, beyond righteousness, in quest of goodness*. It is linked with our love of beauty; it is akin to poetry, if by poetry we mean "distance, loneliness and singing"; a sense of the Beyond by which we know that the horizons are not garden walls and the stars are more than lights in a

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

cottage window. A wild, sad joy, an unutterable sigh lying in the depths of the soul, one hears it breathing through the literature and liturgy of man; a loneliness that wakes with him in the morning, a wistfulness that haunts him at eventide. What art may hope to ensnare this thing that stirs us deeper than any words can tell, a mystery, a wonder and a divine desire? As Chesterton said it in song,

For men are homesick in their homes,  
And strangers under the sun,  
And they lay their heads in a foreign land  
Whenever the day is done.

No one can define religion; it breaks through all language and escapes. At once a mystery and a madness, no one can tell what it will do or become next, except that it will do some impossible thing and talk about it in parables. One day it gives us a militarist like Cromwell, the next a pacifist like Tolstoi or Gandhi. It turns Fra Angelico to art, and the Puritans against art. In one age it created the drama, and in the next prohibited it. It fashions a stately Roman procession and a quaint Quaker bonnet; the Gothic glory of a cathedral—its tower a nesting place of dreams—and the drabness of a country meetinghouse. It inspired Peter the Hermit, who led hosts across a continent to fight for an empty tomb, and Francis of Assisi who kissed a leper and preached to the doves—a vision to haunt our dreams. It contrives theologies and composes anthems. Clinging in its conservatism, it yet dares the far reach and search after the final goal and good of

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

¶ life, passing all frontiers in "the cold, high glory of the watch."

¶ An acute awareness of unattained possibility, a sense of "the beyond that is within," religion is to morality what genius is to talent, as love is to duty. Talent does what it can, toiling terribly at its task, and proud of its work. Genius does what it must, moved by a swift, creative impulse, with an effortless ease that is unaware of toil. No wonder talent is vain, and genius humble. Duty does what is required; love does all it can, pouring out its treasure even upon the most unworthy object, bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things. No moral law would have sent Jesus to the Cross, or Damien to serve the lepers. If left to itself, untaught by reason and unrestrained by moral law, religion may be a plague, sinking into all sorts of superstition. When the three toil together, it is religion that makes life now a lyric, now an epic, lifting our fleeting days on wings until they blend with the Eternal Life.

¶ A gleam, if nothing more, of this eternal mysticism is in all of us, though we may not be aware of it; something of the strange power that draws stones together into the mellow beauty of an old cathedral, its steps worn by myriad feet. It makes us at home in all places where men lift hands in prayer, where burns "the lamp of poor souls" to guide the wandering feet of humanity. Pity and piety are akin, and they blend in a tender pathos such as made me want to stop at every wayside shrine left standing on the battlefields of Flanders and pray for friend and foe alike, lost in a

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

night of war, dark, dreadful and confused. If religion seems to divide, at last, set free, it will link into unity all holy places of all ages, giving thanks for the one truth that hallows the earth, rejoicing in each shrine for the beauty entrusted to it.

### IV

There is another thing that I know, as I know nothing else: both *my moral sense and my religious nature*—shy, lonely, wistful, adventurous—*find fulfillment and satisfaction in the life, personality and character of Jesus*, as nowhere else. To me Jesus is a mystery; he outtops my knowledge. A friend of mine asked Bertrand Russell two questions: Do you fully understand the Einstein theory of relativity? and do you go with him all the way? Quick as a flash the great mathematician replied: "I answer the first question in the negative, and the second in the affirmative." That is exactly my attitude toward Jesus. He baffles my mind, but he searches my heart and sways it as no one else can do. His tragic Figure of heroic moral loveliness subdues me, chastens me, challenges me, redeems me. His morality is so spiritual, and his spirituality so moral, so high yet so haunting—at once pure and purifying—and so winsome withal, and dyed in all the hues of human life. Without him moral law seems stern, awful, impossible; with him it walks beside me, incarnate in a Friend, who seeks and finds me, teaching me to follow him by making me love him. Such purity, such heroism,

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

such love-anointed goodness, such healing sympathy and fearless faith break my heart—and mend it.

To me Jesus is a dream come true, a vision verified, the lost, ineffable Word made flesh and then spirit again; the Life that interprets life, revealing a tender love hidden in a terrible mystery. A thousand questions about him baffle me utterly, yet even my perplexity about him is precious. Besides, the questions which he seems to ask me are far more searching than any I can ask about him. Others seem able to draw the mystic line which divides the human and the divine, but I cannot. I have no such skill. An old, craggy creed tells me that Jesus is of one substance with God, and I believe it is true; but I do not know it. Indeed, I do not know what the substance of man is, much less what the substance of God may be. In fact, I do not know what any kind of substance is. We do not think in such terms today. With us a thing is what it does. Even matter has become a mystery; it melts under our very gaze into a whirling energy, leaving the materialist nothing to stand on. Such thoughts and things are beyond my competence, outside my ken.

But Jesus is very real and near, at once august and intimate, in spite of piled-up ages, and his words move me like great music, as if they knew all my hopes and fears and dreams. Nay, more; in a way I cannot explain even to myself, he is able to unlock doors in my nature accessible to no one else and enter, a dear, implacable Friend. When he is with me, faith is not the pressure of a veiled hand hidden in the unseen, much less an act of pure intellect, but a deep friendship. More than that

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

my words cannot tell. A student in the Harvard Divinity School, of the class of 1913, wrote the following lines, which have been set to music by Lowell Mason. They tell what we can know about Jesus, which we may learn of his fellowship, summing up in simple words things for which words were never made:

I know not how that Bethlehem's Babe  
Could in the Godhead be;  
I only know the Manger-Child  
Has brought God's life to me.

I know not how that Calvary's Cross  
A world from sin could free;  
I only know its matchless love  
Has brought God's love to me.

I know not how that Joseph's Tomb  
Could solve death's mystery;  
I only know the living Christ  
Our immortality.

## V

One other thing I know, too, beyond the shadow of doubt or cavil: *soon or late I must obey the vision of moral power and spiritual beauty I have seen in Jesus: I can never be happy until I do.* But, if we needs must follow the highest when we see it, we must have help for the adventure, and we can get it. This, too, I know with an assurance made doubly sure by the testing of time and trial. The church, in spite of its faults and failings, is a profound help. Of course a man can educate himself as Lincoln did, through lonely years of

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

study. But the quest is much more inspiring in the stimulating air of a university, in the fellowship of men seeking light. The church is "a society for the promotion of goodness in the world," as Arnold said, and to unite in an historic fellowship of men seeking goodness is both an inspiration and a consecration. It is like climbers of the Alps who tie themselves together, so that if one slip all hold him up.

Times without number, in the midst of the years, I have had reason to thank God that I entered the Church as a boy, bowed at its altar, and took upon me its high vows. It has been a restraint, a reinforcement, a refinement. As Swinburne said of Tennyson in old age, before he crossed the bar: "It is an inspiration just to know that he is there"; just to know that he is keeping the light of poetry aglow. Again and again it has been a help to me, and a challenge, just to know that a society of men seeking goodness exists, humble folk keeping the faith, loyal to the ideal, following with faltering steps a heavenly vision. How often in history men have reviled the church, only to find in a wild and fateful hour that it is the keeper of all the sanctities. Few are happy about the church as it is today. Its petty debates repel, its archaic methods annoy, its theological museum is a lumber room of antiques. But it is the House of God, the place where His name is holy and where we may hallow it in our hearts.

The Bible is a help, too, though, alas, it is so little known and used by those who would love it best if they sought its counsel. Of theories about the Bible there are many, but none of them account for its age-

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

enduring influence and power. The theories pass, but the Bible remains the supreme book of the soul, more like a force of nature than a work of artless art. Whether it is infallible or not nobody knows. In order to know that I should have to be infallible myself, and then I would not need it. One thing is true: the Bible grew out of a deep spiritual life, and when rightly used and obeyed it will create in us, infallibly, the kind of life which created it. It speaks with an authority of insight, of ages of tragic and triumphant experience, alike in the granitic solidity of its prose and in the flaming splendor of its poetry and prophecy. It is a wise and faithful guide; some of its pages are bread and meat and milk to me.

Also, there is help for all who ask for it in prayer; I know it because I have tried it. No philosophy can fathom the secret of prayer. Any theory of it is but an outer scaffolding on the wall of the temple, far from the inmost altar where the fret and burden of life are taken away. At once a fact and a mystery, it is as blessed as it is baffling. Whether we call it fellowship with God or adjustment to the universe, it deals directly with reality wherein, as Dante told us, lies our peace. Of all forms of human effort, prayer is the most profoundly practical, if we add the will to listen and work for its answer. One reads the life of St. Theresa with mingled awe and joy, remembering the eighteen years she devoted to the mastery of this highest of all arts. What amateurs we are, hardly knowing the alphabet of prayer—as if the disciplines of the life of the spirit were less exacting than those of art!

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

These things I know beyond a doubt, and upon them I build a working faith for today and a singing hope for the morrow. Moral law and liberty, the sense of the Infinite in the finite, the fascination and challenge of the life of Jesus, and what the Prayer Book calls "the means of grace"—life cannot be ignoble or worthless when it gives us such guidance in a world where there is truth to seek, love to win, work to do, and beauty to adore. It is a capacity for the highest, and by faith founded on fact we can make it a happy, high-hearted adventure, and bring down to the Gate in the Mist something that ought not to die.



# Why We Believe



*Notes of a sermon-address to a student group at the University of Pennsylvania, followed by a forum discussion. If the address covered a vast territory, the questions asked traversed a much wider area. However, the thesis remained unshaken, and it disarmed much debate.*

## WHY WE BELIEVE

*Lord, increase our faith.*

—Luke 17:5.

O MAN IS SO APT TO BELIEVE TOO LITTLE AS THE MAN WHO BEGAN BY BELIEVING TOO MUCH, OR RATHER TOO MANY THINGS, AS IF trying to see in detail the fashion of things to be, making theology an *Atlas* of Eternity. In reaction against what it deems the overbelief of the last generation our age has fallen into an underbelief, far below what is its right. If our fathers asked how good is the most that we can mean by the word "God," their sons inquire how real is the least we can mean by it. Today men are haunted by the fear that faith is too good to be true, whereas in other days they felt that even the highest faith is not good enough to be true.

One result of the underbelief of our day is the tragedy of trying to live a maximum life on a minimum faith; and it cannot be done. No wonder men go to pieces under the strain of it. All sorts of ills beset us because we lack support from a source hid in the unseen. How strange: in an age which will have no inhibitions many are actually inhibiting the finest faculty, if not the supreme capacity, of human nature. They ignore or suppress an unseen element of thought and yearning out of which is born the quest for a Reality

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

which inspires, justifies and satisfies the best in us. What we need is not faith in more things, but more faith in a few profound things which make us men, whence men in all ages have derived inward sustaining and hope.

What makes us believe anything at all? There must be some necessity in us which requires faith and begets it, otherwise man would not make such amazing affirmations about the worth and meaning of life. Why do we believe? Is it because our fathers before us believed? Partly, no doubt; and that is a good enough reason, lest we break the mystic continuity of inheritance in respect to the highest life. Our finest hope, said George Eliot, is our finest memory. But why did our fathers believe? Had they learned to understand? Emphatically not. Really we understand next to nothing in the universe—even matter is a mystery, and the nature of gravitation and cohesion is a closed book. Many things are inscrutable, if not utterly incredible, yet they are true, and, if true, they cannot be absurd. Clearly it was not understanding, but experience, that led our fathers to hold a high, heroic faith.

Nor do we believe because we have proved the truths of faith. Very far from it. Proof! Proof! is the cry of our generation, not knowing what it asks. Faith can neither be demonstrated nor argued down, else it would not be faith. If we could prove God in the manner of a theorem of geometry, He would be only a theorem, and not the God we need and seek. God is God just because a proof that would put Him beyond the reach of all possible denial is impossible and absurd—just

## WHY WE BELIEVE

because He can and does confirm Himself against all denials and contradictions, being Himself the author of the issues which prompt those denials and contradictions. Also, such proof as men demand, and think they are wise in demanding, is by nature a compulsion; and nowhere is compulsion more out of place than in the life of the spirit—since both God and man must be free.

Why, then, do we believe? Let us dig down to the roots of religion—down below the dogmas of every creed—and discover, if possible, the basis of belief. For, every man knows that we are moved most deeply not by the many things we try to believe, but by the elemental things which we cannot persuade ourselves to deny, without resigning our manhood. Obviously man would not need religious faith, still less invent it—let alone embark upon its adventures—if the Object of it did not exist, since he did not create the conditions which evoke and require it. There would be nothing to suggest it, nothing to sustain it. Manifestly, so vast a fact and force as religion is a part of the reality and sanctity of life, having its warrant in the order of the universe, as well as in the nature and need of man.

Life is first; philosophy follows after. The Reality with which religious faith has to do is given us by life itself, as a primary experience, and it has about it an immediacy and an ineffability which belong to all primary perceptions. That is to say, there is a mystical element in it which knowledge can never wholly capture, much less formulate. What is given in primary

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

experience furnishes the data and sets the problems for reflection, but it is not exhausted in any exposition. There is always a margin of mystery baffling the thinker, as there is a haunting beauty which eludes the artist. As Goethe said, the Ultimate Reality can never be uttered; it can only be acted, and in our efforts to ensnare it in a web of words we may lose the Unutterable Truth, before which silence is wisdom and wonder becomes worship.

### I

Let us begin at the beginning, taking the first Truth and the last, God the Eternal; God infinitesimally vast. Our faith in God involves our whole being, and is born of feelings, yearnings, hauntings, intuitions and thoughts which defy analysis; it is the account which life gives of itself when it is healthy, wholesome and free. Life and love, joy and sorrow, pity and pain and death, the blood in the veins of man, the milk in the breast of woman, the laughter of little children, the coming and going of days, radiant beauty and blinding tragedy, all the old, sweet, sad, human things which make up our mortal lot—these are the basis of our faith in God. It is older than argument, profounder than debate, as old as the home and the family, as tender as infancy and old age, as deep as love and death.

It is so historically, as far back as human records go. Men lived and died by faith in God—the Nameless One of a hundred names—long before philosophy was born, or ever theology had learned its alphabet. If we

## WHY WE BELIEVE

have ears, we may hear penitential psalmists praising God on yonder side of the pyramids; and in the Valley of the Kings, five thousand years ago, Ikhnaton wrote of the unity and purity of God, celebrating a Presence revealed, yet also concealed, in the strange and solemn beauty of the world. So run the annals of the ages, testifying to the verity of God in the life of man. Yes, there has been denial of God in every age, because, as Tolstoi told Gorki, man thwarts his own soul, inhibits his finest impulses, and inflicts injury upon his highest nature. One thinks of the old saint and the young nobleman in *War and Peace*, and how, when the Count said with a sneer that he did not believe in God, the old philosopher smiled, as a mother might smile at the silly sayings of a child. Then in a gentle voice the old man said:

"You do not know Him, sir, and that is why you are very unhappy. But He is here, He is within me, He is in my words, He is in thee, and even in these scoffing words that thou hast just uttered. If He were not, we would not be speaking of Him. Of Whom were we speaking? Whom dost thou deny? Who invented Him, if He be not? How came there within thee the conception that there is such an incomprehensible Being?" Something in the eyes of the Count betrayed his longing to know God, and the old man, reading his face, answered the unasked question of his heart. "Yes, God exists, but to know Him

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

is hard. It is not attained by reason, but by life. The highest wisdom and truth is like the purest dew, which we try to hold within us. Can I hold in an impure vessel that pure dew and judge of its purity? Only by inner purification of myself can I bring that dew contained within me to some degree of purity."

Not only is God implied in our very thought, He is affirmed even in our denials, and without Him we are left with a God-shaped void in our hearts; as men who have had an arm or a leg amputated say they still feel an ache in the absent member. In his beguiling tale, *Where the Blue Begins*, Christopher Morley invested his dog Gissing with human passions and perplexities, the better to show how man is harassed by the inscrutable issues of life and destiny. With a dog-nose, as sensitive as the spirit of a poet, Gissing sought to ~~scent~~ the footsteps of God through the mire and maze of human affairs, in cathedral and counting-house, on land and sea, driven by a hunger for "a horizon that would stay blue when he reached it." He ~~felt~~ sometimes as though his heart had been broken off from some great whole, to which it yearned to be ~~reunited~~—like a bone that had been buried which God would some day dig up. Always it is so, especially in our day, when a shallow skepticism has amputated God from so many souls. For, until we are led or lifted into a sense of union with the Whole of life, which gives unity and meaning to all its parts, the urge to

## WHY WE BELIEVE

completeness, so deeply rooted in the soul, can never be fulfilled.

God is a Reality given us in experience; our idea of Him is an effort to make Him richly real and vivid in our lives. Of course, God is far above and beyond any idea of Him that ever dwelt in the soul of man, as the heaven is high above the earth. Therefore, we ought to think of God in the light of the highest truth our minds can know and the purest ideal our hearts can dream, the while we learn to find Him everywhere, in our own souls, and in all the shapes which life and love and duty take. Never has it been so difficult to think of God as it is today, not because He is less real or less necessary, but because, as has often happened before, the old symbols of faith have become inadequate, if not impossible. Inevitably, our dogmas are only "words thrown out toward a great Object of consciousness"; not descriptions, but ascriptions. Still, because we cannot know all about God does not imply that we are unable to know anything about Him. To the measure of our capacity we can know God by what He is in us and to us, and our knowledge increases as far and as fast as we are ready and willing to go. Only God is permanently interesting, and to know Him is to know what life is and what it means.

No man was ever argued into faith in God; no man was ever argued out of it. The sources of belief, and unbelief, lie further back and deeper down, and no logic can take out of the soul what logic did not put into it. When a man loses faith in God, it is due not to argument—no matter how he may rationalize his de-

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

nial—but to some inner disaster, betrayal or neglect, or else some acid distilled in the soul has dissolved the Pearl of Great Price. What we need, then, is not argument about God, which avails nothing, but adjustment to Him in whom we live and with whom we have to do every day, everywhere. If it be asked how we can adjust ourselves to God until we know what He is, the answer is not far to seek—we are doing it all the time. Nobody knows what electricity is. Some say it is a kind of fluid; others that it is an ether tension. But nobody really knows. Yet we adjust ourselves to it, making it run our errands and light our houses. Jesus, who based everything on experience, said that by single-hearted devotion to the best we know, we may learn the Truth most worth knowing; and to that high quest he calls us.

## II

Why do we believe in Jesus? Why did men ever think that a peasant Teacher walking our human way, browned by sun, wet by the rain, weary in the heat of the day, is God of very God? A story of old Japan, as told by Lafcadio Hearn, may give us a clue. When the people of a tiny village by the sea were out working in their low-lying rice fields, an earthquake came. Happily, one man, whose farm was on the hill behind the village, was not working with his neighbors, and from his higher level he saw what the others did not see. He saw the sea draw swiftly back beyond its usual limits of retreat, and he knew at once that it meant

## WHY WE BELIEVE

the coming of a tidal wave. Not an instant was to be lost; the people must be gathered to the hills or perish.

Hastily he set fire to his rice ricks—all that he had—and furiously rang the temple bell. His neighbors in the fields below heard the sound, and looked up and saw the smoke of the burning ricks. They rushed to the hills to help their neighbor, as they thought, in his dire plight. Then, looking seaward, they saw the wild waters rushing in over the place where they had been working, overwhelming their fields in ruin, and understood how they had been saved. The story tells how, after the disaster was over and the ruin repaired—the man who had done this heroic, self-sacrificing act being still alive and their neighbor—the folk of the village used to go to their temple and worship his spirit. It was as though in the saving act of a neighbor and friend there had been revealed to them a swift touch and vivid glimpse of “A Living God,” which is the title of the story.

In the same manner, as men walked with Jesus in the days of His flesh, watched His works of mercy and heard his words of beauty, they became aware of the Living God revealed, as Turgenev said, in a “face that looked like the faces of all other men, just a common human face.” As they followed Him in those swift and gentle years, God became real, vivid, near, ever ready to welcome the erring, to receive the sinful, to heal the afflicted; a Father whose love may be known in the simple joys of the lowly, no less than in the vision of the seer. Jesus did not argue about God—who, because He is love, is known only by love—but his friends saw

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

in him something more Godlike than they had ever known. In fellowship with him a change was wrought in their inner life; new power came into their hearts, life was deeper and death less final. Up to the Cross they saw him go, facing all that fate and his foes could do, trusting the power of love alone; and it won, turning defeat into victory. In spite of all obstacles, no power was able to stand against its irresistible might—not even death itself!

As his disciples looked back at the days spent in the company of Jesus, it was plain that a new element had entered into the life of man through his life. He was not simply another kind of man, but a new spiritual species, in whom the center of gravity had shifted from selfishness to otherness, not fitfully but in constant and creative urge. His words were the same, fresh as the dew and bright with color, less like images than actions, as if life itself were speaking; and their meaning grew until they shone like stars. His death was the same dark mystery, but it detached itself from its place in time and became an unveiling of the law of love hidden behind the hardness of life. Yet he was so richly human, and so winsome withal, as if God had waited and worked for man to become pure enough to embody His spirit and life: "Man toward God, God toward Man," to put it so. To such a profound paradox of faith and fact men were led by the love of God in the life of Jesus. How is he related to us, standing so close to us while towering so high above us, and how is he related to God whom he brings so near, and of

## WHY WE BELIEVE

whom he compels us to think with a new intimacy and insight?

To answer these questions many dogmas have been devised, but they do not explain the mystery. Nor is it solved by denying all dogmas about Jesus; we may even be brought nearer to him, with demands which we can neither meet nor evade. We do not escape Jesus by casting aside the creeds, as so many do in our day. Still he confronts us, entralls us, haunts us. In our far-off age we read his Life anew, seeking the sources of that stream of sweetness and light—and lightning!—which entered the world with his advent; but we are baffled. We ponder his words, as simple as the prayer of a child, yet profounder than any philosophy, and our hearts ache with awe. Why do we believe in Jesus? Because we cannot help it; because we cannot deny his purity, his pity, his holy kindness, his intrepid love, his relentless mercy, his incredible faith in us even when we have no faith of our own.

### III

Who do we believe in the Bible? The only treasure of a material kind which my mother left me when she went away was her Bible, old and well-nigh worn out by much use. If I had not known her life of faith, and had not seen her kneeling figure down the years, I would have known the history of her heart by turning the pages of the Book she loved, lived with, and sought to obey. Certain Psalms were like springs of bright water along her pilgrim way, where she found rest

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

and refreshment. Passages from the Prophets stirred her like great music. The life of Jesus—especially the fourteenth chapter of St. John—gave her light in darkness, fellowship in loneliness, help for today and hope for tomorrow. She had a deep affinity with the Christ-mysticism of St. Paul, and understood the idiom of his experience. Yet she had no theory about the Bible, beyond its beauty and blessing and the fact that it spoke the Word of God to her heart.

What was true of one devout soul has been true of millions of men and women, all down the ages; and that is why we believe in the Bible. In this wise and faithful Book is the very stuff of life itself, the realities out of which, not as a theory, but as a fact, faith in God grows. The writers of the Bible did not argue; they obeyed. They lived before they wrote. They were men of like passions as ourselves, of like faiths and fears and failings. They wrestled with reality; they were sorely tried, and their cries of anguish echo to this day—deathless trumpets from the oblivion of olden time. In weakness they were made strong; in darkness they saw “the brightness on the other side of life”; in death they were not dismayed. They needed forgiveness for sin, solace in sorrow, courage in defeat, and guidance in a tangled, troubled world. What they needed they found in God the Eternal, and in God alone, and they set down in simple words—gritty with reality, wet with tears—what they learned of His will, His love, His plans for them and their duty to Him. In short, they showed us in actual life how the victory is won, how truth is known by living, and how the face

## WHY WE BELIEVE

of God shines in the purest vision of man, as the clouds contain the sunlight.

What about today? One thing at least is true: God is not dumb that He should speak no more, and the Bible teaches us how to read His newer Word in the facts, forces, events, and persons of our time. Is the Bible inspired? Manifestly, if only because it inspires us, lightens our darkness, rebukes our vanity, and heals the old hurts of life. For the same reason we may say that it is infallible, if we adopt the old Saxon word *in-full-hein*, in the sense in which our forefathers employed it in early English, as meaning "that which will not fall down." No argument is needed; the fact proves it. Ages of experience attest the strength and wisdom of the Bible as the Book of the Will of God in the life of man, outlasting all dogmas devised to defend it.

## IV

Why do men believe in prayer? To ask why men pray is like asking why birds sing; they are made so. Men are made for prayer, as sparks ascending seek the sun. As William James said, men pray "because they cannot help praying"; because they are seeking a Great Companion; and he adds, "men will continue to pray until the end of time, unless their inner natures change in a manner which nothing we know leads us to expect." It is because we and God have business with each other, and down in our hearts, when we are forced to face our own souls, each of us knows that in that business our highest destiny is fulfilled. The proof of

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

prayer is prayer itself; all argument about it is absurd. As Meredith said, "Who rises from prayer a better man, his prayer is answered"—and that is as far as we need to go. Here experience is the first and the final test.

No matter how far back we go in the human story, we find an altar set up in the center of the life of man. Through all altering fashions of life and thought, in the midst of all desolations and disasters, there is one constant and abiding reality upon which men may rely. What is it? What is the root of religion which defies each age afresh to discover and assess its secret? Some call it mysticism, some use other names; it does not matter what we call it, since it baffles all words. But the fact remains today as in all the past: whenever men hunger and thirst after God and truly seek Him, there is a response of peace and power; and by that token the soul lives. It is a primary experience, the bedrock of all religion, at once the basis of its faith and the fountain of its fellowship; and many waters cannot quench it. Mayhap the next great step in human advance will be a further dimension of this power of prayer, and the discovery that the problems of the world are solved by it.

For what is prayer? It is not getting from God but getting to God through the mists and fogs of the mind; not asking God to do something for us, but to do something in us and with us. It is not beseeching God to give us what we want, but to make us worthy and willing to receive what is already our own, and to do what He wants us to do. If we try to use God for our

## WHY WE BELIEVE

own ends instead of being used by Him for His ends, our prayer fails—we cannot exploit God. Nor must we ask anything for ourselves that we do not ask for our fellow souls; even in our private prayer, as in the little liturgy which Jesus gave us for the closet, it is *our* Father, and not *my* Father. Our final solitude must be a fellowship, since no man can find God for another and no one can find Him alone. God knows what we are and what we need as we do not know, and it is always ready for us when we are humble enough to take it and good enough to share it.

Jesus did not argue about prayer; he prayed. If he needed it in living his good life—needed nourishing nights of prayer to empower him for busy days of labor—it is sheer vanity of us to neglect it, still more to say that we do not need it. For prayer is at once an art and an adventure, and those who learn its laws and dare its high reaches find sources of power unguessed by those who stay behind; to them the porter openeth. Aye, prayer is the art and adventure whereby we lay hold of that in God and in ourselves which enables us to do our duty and labor, and to endure and triumph over anything that life or death can do to us.

## V

Why do we believe in life further on? By what process did man ever imagine that the still, strange sleep which falls upon us all at last, covering our fading faces with a soft, fascinating darkness, is not the end? Over the piled-up ages we hear a voice in the

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

desert asking the question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" Surely there is no "if" about death; other things may happen, but death is inescapable. Yet from the far time when the Pyramid Texts were written man has defied death, disputed its verdict, and refused to admit that the grave is the gigantic coffin-lid of a dull and mindless world descending upon him. It is magnificent, but what is the basis of such an incredible faith?

As Martineau put it picturesquely, we do not believe in immortality because we have proved it, but we are forever trying to prove it because we cannot help believing it. To refer once more to the Tolstoi story of *War and Peace*, when Pierre set forth the theory of Herder in respect to immortality, the Prince replied: "But it is not that, my dear boy, convinces me; but life and death are what have convinced me. Not by argument, but when one goes hand-in-hand with some one, and all at once that some one slips away yonder into nowhere, and you are left facing an abyss. There is a Yonder and there is Someone—God." That is to say, he believes because God is God, and man is man, and life is what it is. These three found focus and became incandescent in Jesus, in whom we see what God is, what man may be, and to what fine issues life ascends. Once we see what it is that gives dignity, worth and meaning to life, argument for immortality is not needed. Until we do see it, argument is useless.

In the Antarctic wastes, in order to save his friends the necessity of carrying his helpless, frost-bitten body, Captain Oates rose one night, while the others were

## WHY WE BELIEVE

sleeping, and walked out into the icy air and was seen no more. It was a calm self-immolation for the sake of others, with no hot emotion, no public audience, no ecstatic vision to urge him on. In a ghastly tragedy at sea, a young Salvation Army officer, in order to make room for a man to join his wife and little ones in an already overcrowded boat, slipped quietly overboard into a wild sea and disappeared. Or, turning to fiction, in *Les Misérables*, in order to save an innocent man from being condemned in his place, Jean Valjean denounced himself for a crime of which he had not been accused; and Hugo adds, "all were dazzled in their hearts." It is this divine quality in man, manifested alike in high and humble lot, which defeats death and attests the eternal quality of the soul, either on the Cross or in a wintry sea.

As if by some sure instinct, man has felt the force of this quality in our race from the first, and the prophecy of it. To put it succinctly, if God is a God to whom such sacred values have worth, we cannot doubt immortality. If He is not such a God, nobody wants immortality; it would be a doom, not a destiny. To think otherwise is to make life a horror and a chaos, in which Jesus and Judas are alike erased in a blur of indistinguishable dust. In obedience to a clear intuition of realities, as well as of values, man has been wise enough to trust the sanity and sanctity of life, repudiating blind fears which rob life of its meaning. For, if life is worthless, so is immortality.

My thesis, all through, has been to show that experience is profounder than argument, as life is deeper

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

than logic. Long ago Pascal said, "the heart has its reasons which the reason knows not of"; which means that what is truly religious is ultimately reasonable, but that reason alone does not discover it. By the same token, if we would live by the faith which makes life heroic and happy, we must keep our hearts with all diligence, lest they become too hard, too crowded, or too careless to bear the fruits of the spirit, as Jesus warned us in the Parable of the Soils. For, literally, out of the heart are the issues of life, whether we lose the treasure most worth keeping, or learn the truth that makes us free, which is known only to the pure of heart and the doers of the will of God.

(The adolescent mind is appalling alike in its cocksureness and in its confusion; but it may not be amiss to name some of the issues raised in the discussion following the sermon. First, the idea is widespread that the church, because it affirms the Reality of God, professes to know all about Him. Whereas the church once issued an anathema against anyone who should declare that God is comprehensible. Obviously, God is incomprehensible, but indefinitely apprehensible—and that is all we really need. Second, of course all the dark facts of life which seem to belie faith in God were brought up, forgetting that while those facts destroy the faith of many today—perhaps because their faith is traditional and at second-hand—those very facts created faith in God in the beginning. "Tribulation worketh faith," said the Apostle; and it was by facing the bitter, old and haggard worst that the masters of the spiritual life have always found the best—whereof the Cross is the eternal symbol. Third, a number in the group declared themselves to be atheists, but when asked to describe the kind of God they denied, it turned out to be such a caricature as to provoke laughter. One realized anew why there is so much theophobia in our day, because no worthy idea of God

## WHY WE BELIEVE

has replaced the childish thought of a Big Man in the sky. Fourth, the mechanists described at length the intricacy of the world machine, only to discover that they were thereby making it the more impossible to think that it is mindless. Fifth, the humanists made themselves heard, affirming that God is only an idea in the mind—as if the same were not true of the universe, too, which we know only as it is reflected in our minds, since we cannot jump out of our skins; but that is no reason for “moving out of the house of God into a bleak orphanage.” It was odd to hear the melodramatic rhetoric of Bertrand Russell quoted like Holy Scripture, as if his glib and glittering dogmatism settled the issue. He is as dogmatic as Athanasius; only his dogma is different. Sixth, it was plain that much of the revolt of modern youth is due to resentment against parental authority, in other connections, and is directed at parental religious ideas by way of retaliation. Seventh, it is extraordinary to see a generation throwing the Christian faith lightly aside, without any understanding of the history and meaning of that faith; yet so it is. Eighth, the most vivid impression of the evening was the assumption—amounting almost to an obsession—that science inhibits all spiritual faith; due not to men of science, but to immature minds using second-hand knowledge to belabor the Church. When asked which science inhibits faith, and how and why? there was no reply. Ninth, in contrast with the devastating “smartness” of a few, there were those who are convinced that Jesus saw straight and knew what he was talking about, and have sworn allegiance to his vision.)



# God Our Eternal Refuge





## GOD OUR ETERNAL REFUGE

*The Eternal God is thy refuge, and  
underneath are the everlasting arms.*

—Deut. 33:27.



HESE WORDS, SO FREQUENT IN THE BIBLE, ESPECIALLY IN THE PSALMS, TELL US OF A FAR TIME WHEN LIFE WAS FULL OF PERIL AND MAN SO often had to seek shelter. They take the form of double repetition, so familiar in Hebrew poetry, as if to make doubly sure the Divine reality over against our human need. Indeed, if we turn to the context we learn not only that God is beneath our necessity, but also that He is behind us to protect, before us to guide, and above us to bless. So encompassed, we make our way through the world like the people which were of old, albeit, like them, we so often forget "Him in whose great hand we stand," our truest Refuge, our surest Protection.

Such a text might have been written yesterday, so true it is to the facts of life and the deep need of the soul. Today, as of old, our life is in jeopardy every hour, haunted by a sense of insecurity, beset by perils of many kinds—physical, moral, and spiritual. The weather of the world is rough, and even the bravest man must sometimes long for the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, a shelter in the time of storm.

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

True, we dwell in a far-flung universe, in the midst of measureless forces, but also in the presence of profound necessities. Nor has all our wisdom taught us a deeper truth than that told us in this couplet of ancient song. It is because God is eternal that He is our refuge; and it is because His arms are everlasting in their strength, in their nearness, in their faithfulness, that there is comfort in their underneath. Living in an age so troubled, so distraught, we need to know that those mighty arms are about us.

Men seek out many places of refuge, none of which are to be despised, and some of which it is worth our while to name. Some years ago Maxim Gorki told us of his childhood in that strange land of Russia, and more recently he has been telling us of his advent *In the World*—how he was kicked into it and told to make his own way. There is much in the book that is terrible, but not a little beauty, too, including a vivid portrait gallery of those whom he met in his wayfaring. It may be noted that this record of adolescent years, spent amid so much that was uncontrolled, vicious, and cruel, is a singularly pure chronicle. The boy was thoroughly healthy, in mind as well as body. All the men he knew had the same attitude toward women, and it filled him with disgust. So did the drinking, the thieving, the quarreling, the useless cruelty. He thought about these things, and he saw that people with whom he lived, in one place as in another, were cruel and vicious from sheer emptiness of life. The shadow that lies over his pages is the shadow, not of actual oppression, not of ill-nature—not of poverty even—but of dreariness, of

## GOD OUR ETERNAL REFUGE

meaninglessness. Life was so dull, so stupid, so colorless, so hideous that men sought escape from its monotony in malicious diversions. From such a lot, from such a fate the lad sought a refuge, and he found it in books, especially in books of poetry. Blessed be books, because they thus offered to a sensitive, aspiring soul a refuge from the foulness of the world. All through the years of his youth the vast importance of books is emphasized, and we trace his slowly developing power as a maker of books. Then through later experiences among rough folk, vulgar folk, books were literally his salvation. From all the weariness and brutality of his environment the lad had always a place of retreat, for which he was grateful. Of some of his readings he writes in words the truth of which some of us can confirm:

"These books laved my soul, washing away the husks of barren and bitter reality. I felt that they were good books, and realized that they were indispensable to me. One result of reading them was that I gained a firm conviction that I was not alone in the world, and the fact that I should not be lost took firm root in my soul. . . . While not hindering me from seeing reality, such as it was, nor cooling my desire to understand living people, nevertheless this bookish chaos hid me by a transparent but impenetrable cloud from much of the infectious obscenity, the venomous poison of life. Books rendered many evils innocuous to me."

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

And speaking of books, if we open the *Life and Poetry of James Thomson*, by Meeker, we learn how another man, walking a shadowy way, found refuge. It is a pity that Thomson is known only for his one great pessimistic poem, "The City of Dreadful Night," the terrible city—London!—made the more terrible by too much Scotch whiskey in the poet. He had more than one string to his harp. Happily, his biographer shows us his life through his poems, and this unveiling of his heart discloses a secret sanctuary. It was a romance not unlike that of Dante and Beatrice, and it was the unifying influence of his character and his art. The "one woman" whom Thomson loved died when he was nineteen, and for the remaining thirty years of his life her image never left his heart. She became the embodiment of all the supreme loveliness of the world, and softened much of the sadness into which his way of living and his inherent tendency to despair would else have plunged him. Thus "into every poem that he wrote this memory of Matilda Weller's love is subtly but unfailingly woven. With her death, he, too, began a new life." When life pressed upon him, and when foes seemed too many to fight, he betook himself to that sanctuary of love and memory for refuge.

Different men find escape and shelter in different ways, but every man must have a place of refuge. George Eliot said "The human heart finds shelter nowhere but in human kind"; with which agrees the strange statement of Darwin that religion is unnecessary to those surrounded by domestic affection. Surely the exact opposite of this statement is true. Not one of

## GOD OUR ETERNAL REFUGE

us will undervalue the strength, the sweetness, the joy of what Whitman calls "the dear love of man for his comrade, the attraction of friend to friend." But there is in no human being an actual or potential self-sufficiency. Besides, no one need be reminded that death is never far away, and the very fleetingness of our human fellowship adds to its insecurity. Heine was one of the keenest wits of his day, and a sharp critic of religion—the quality of his thought being a smile, a tear, and a sneer all mixed up. Despite his skepticism and his genius, we find him confessing his helplessness at the bedside of his dying mother:

"I thought over all the great and little inventions of man, but nothing would answer. Then I commended her to God, and composed a prayer that she might read it. She was my mother, and she had always loved me dearly, and she was going away from me, and this was all I could do for her. We are not great, and our happiness is when we can believe in something greater and better than ourselves."

Even so. God is our last refuge, but he is wise who learns the first truth first and does not wait until the end to learn it. Therefore, as the Master taught us, let us seek God first—first in order of time, when life is new and habits are formed; first in order of importance, that the spell of the eternal may lie upon our fleeting days; and first in order of interest, that our life may have unity, purpose and peace. Here is a reality, not

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

simply to die by, but to live by day by day, because it enables us to rest back upon the Eternal. When we are most worn, when we are least sufficient in ourselves, then we find His unceasing and unwithdrawn protection all that we need. Thus we shall be able to meet the duties of life, bear its burdens, win its conflicts, and find its meaning. Such a truth helps one to live reverently, and with a profound sense of responsibility, but also with abiding confidence in One greater, wiser, and holier than himself. Like Luther of old, when he nailed his theses upon the cathedral door, we may sing:

A mighty fortress is our God,  
A refuge never failing.

Here lies the tragedy of the new Humanism, using the word in its modern anti-theistic sense, in which there is no God except as He exists in the mind of man—a shadow of mortal desire cast upon the screen of faith and fancy. Religion, in turn, is regarded as an embellishment of the imagination, an artist drawing radiant horizons around our cottage door, a poet weaving a gold fringe upon an else drab and dingy pattern of life. It is a necessity, since the grind of the world and the buffetings of fate would be too much for us, without the touch of unseen hands and the gleam of celestial visions; a necessity, but not a reality.<sup>1</sup> How

<sup>1</sup>For example in his new book entitled *God*—which, alas, tells us more about its author than about its subject—Middleton Murry writes: “God does not exist: but we shall never be able to do without Him unless we know in ourselves the reason why He was created. That knowledge is dynamic; for no one can know in himself the demands which God was created to satisfy without determining that for his part his life shall be devoted to the perpetuating of those values which God was created to secure.”

## GOD OUR ETERNAL REFUGE

strange it is, reversing all the processes of insight and experience, the result at once of self-sufficiency and self-obsession, a surrender of thought and a bankruptcy of faith. Wherefore such a necessity, and whence the august idea of God, and how did it ever enter the mind of man? What a pitiful obfuscation, man trying to lift himself by his own shoe-laces, trying to warm a frigid universe with his own breath—how unlike the triumphant march of the dynasty of mighty thinkers of the past, who found in God, the Eternal, the basis

---

With which agrees the insight of Bojer in his glorious story, *The Great Hunger*, and again in *The New Temple*: "There is no God except as he exists in the mind of man, but neither is there any misfortune so great that you cannot conquer it by calling on the eternal forces within yourself. It is you, oh man, who gives existence a meaning and a goal; you who have created what there is of the great and beautiful upon earth; aye, you have warmed the cold universe with your faith in an all-loving God. Lift up your heart and show yourself conscious of your greatness."

No doubt it is a mood, a passing phase of thought, due to the disillusionment and distraction of our generation; but it is an extraordinary *débâcle*. It is an obvious truth that man makes God in his own image—of necessity so, since he must think in terms of his own experience, and is justified in taking his own soul as a token of ultimate reality, as well as a stick, a stone, or an electron; but that there is no other God save our mental image—no real God who is slowly making man in *His* image—is an amazing inversion of thought; in short, sheer atheism.

It is of a piece with another favorite dogma of our day, promulgated by Hardy and taken up by lesser lights: that in man the universe, by some freak or fluke, has cast up a being better and finer than itself, with needs it cannot satisfy and dreams it cannot fulfill, whose life is a splash of glory against a black background and whose death is a tragedy. As a dramatization of vanity and self-pity, the history of philosophy has nothing to equal it. For a description and discussion of this odd aspect of contemporary faith, or unfaith, see *Theism and the Modern Mood*, by W. H. Horton, *An Emerging Christian Faith*, by Justin W. Nixon, *The Christian God*, by Richard Roberts, *Humanism*, edited by W. P. King, and by no means least, the chapter on "The Future of Religion," by W. E. Hocking, in *Religion and Modern Life*.

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

of thought, the fulfillment of faith, and the final solace of mortal hope.

Surely nothing is more impressive than the testimony of the history of philosophy that the quest of truth can end in final satisfaction nowhere short of God. Plato and Aristotle were perhaps the greatest, the most original, as they were among the purest minds in their love of truth, in the whole history of human thought. Forever memorable is their witness to the reality and glory of God as the sovereign necessity of the intellect. Their fine minds toiled always under the spell of an Eternal Mind, and their final conclusion was not an argument, but a vision of God. Indeed, the beatific vision of Dante of "the love that moves the sun and all the stars" was nothing but the insight of Aristotle wearing the robe of poetry. Timid minds may hesitate, and small minds may wrangle, but when we come to the end of thought and face the Infinite mystery, wise men take refuge in God—like homing doves at eventide.

Happily, we do not have to go back to the dim past to learn that God is the final home, as He is the first beginning, of the highest thought. Indeed, we need go no further than to the man who embodied so perfectly, both in the dignity of his character and the nobility of his intellect, the spirit and culture of Britain, and in whose words we heard the finer mind of his race—Arthur James Balfour, so recently fallen asleep. Versatile, practical, spiritual, he had that common sense that never parts company with reverence, and saw the highest reality as it is related to the life of everyday. Like

## GOD OUR ETERNAL REFUGE

William James, he revolted from the scientific agnosticism of years ago, repelled by its mock modesty. Agnosticism, by its profession, should have been most humble, but in practice it took enormous pride in its humility, and regarded positive belief with contempt. James and Balfour made themselves champions of belief, one finding in religion the reservoir of the finer energies of man, the other the long span of thought and hope, and the sense of relation to a perfect Being, which gives value to life.

Few would deny that the original element in the work of Balfour as a religious thinker is the way in which he shows how the substance leaks away from the values of life when the eternal horizon is shut out. This is to say, we cannot have the value of religion without its truth. What we think about the origin of man and his destiny makes a vital difference in how we feel about him, and the pursuits of knowledge, beauty, and righteousness that seem to him important. Man has a faculty of knowledge, and that implies that the world to which he belongs is spiritual, having truth as its light. Also, the love of beauty—which has so large a place in the life of this thinker—must have explanation, and he finds it to be a way of access to the Divine. Thus his ripe conclusion is that “all we think best in human culture, whether associated with beauty, goodness, or knowledge, requires God for its support.”

In the same way, God is the support, as He is the high sanction, of the moral life of man. When we regard the still small voice of the moral sense in us as only an echo of old custom, its whisper becomes

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

faint and less commanding, and the feeling of accountability fades. Only when we find in God the sovereign keeper of those spiritual and moral ideals which He inspires men to seek and serve in their own lives is our moral life strong, true and noble. No one can see the end. Even the greatest man can see only a little way in this dark day. Whether revival or reaction will follow this age of confusion none can tell. Rapidly we are moving into a hidden, unknown, unpredictable future. What sustains us is our faith in the final rightness of things. Final rightness, mark you; not that whatever is is right, but that it can be, must be, shall be right. Never was there greater need than now for this assurance, living as we are in a sorely troubled time when there is so much that is shamefully, hideously wrong. Hope and healing lie in that high thinking that grasps great issues and great outlooks, and in simple trust in a great God who has not lost control of His world.

Nor must we miss the note of intimacy in the text, which tells us that "underneath are the everlasting arms." While we think in large terms of the struggle of the world, and the slow triumph of righteousness, each of us has all the time the need of a God who loves us as if there were but one of us to love. Truly it has been said that a God who does not care does not count. Still less can we find help in a God who is fumbling His way through the ages, trying to find His path in the dark. No; what our hearts demand is a guiding, protecting love which shall support us in our high moral tasks, and sweeten the unescapable sorrows which fall to our lot as a part of life. And such a God

## GOD OUR ETERNAL REFUGE

we have, nearer to us than our own souls, to whom we may turn in hours of doubt, depression, and defeat, and find refuge and renewal. How blessed it is to know that there is One who knows us better than we know ourselves, and who is equal to all our mortal needs and our immortal longings.

There is no need to say that in death we must take refuge in God. No one else can help us when "the dumb hour brings the dreams about our couch." John Morley gave us a rare book of *Recollections*, the last line of which is a grave and gallant farewell: "So to my home, and in the falling daylight." What home? The great Void, black and bottomless, to which Ibsen seemed homesick to return at the end? No. The answer is found in the old Road Book of the homeward way: "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place from one generation to another." At Vimy Ridge, just before the Canadian lads went over the top, they began singing the old hymns of the church and the home. One of their favorites was "Jesus, Lover of my soul," and the lines most often on their lips were those which gather up our human need and utter it in melodious prayer:

Other refuge have I none,  
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee;  
Leave, ah! leave me not alone,  
Still support and comfort me:  
All my trust on Thee is stayed,  
All my help from Thee I bring;  
Cover my defenceless head  
With the shadow of Thy wing.



# When God Is Near





## WHEN GOD IS NEAR

*Surely the Lord is in this place; and  
I knew it not.*

—Gen. 28:16.



F COURSE GOD IS ALWAYS NEAR AND ALWAYS BLESSED, BUT MEN ARE NOT ALWAYS AWARE OF IT. THEY MAY ACCEPT IT AS A FAITH, if not a fact, that God is everywhere, and yet have no vivid sense of Him. They live in Him, depend upon Him, and serve Him better than they know, but they may not read aright the tokens of His life in their lives. The Bible is always busy directing attention to the unrecognized presence of God in the thoughts and impulses of men.

My faith has always been that all men are in some degree religious; in fact, mystics, if one may name it so, though they may deny the fact and seek to hide it—even from themselves. Even the saint has no faculties or facts that all men do not possess in some measure; only he uses and interprets them differently. Hours of ecstatic escaping of soul which he welcomes as lucid vision-moments, other men fear and distrust, as if they were dupes, not knowing their meaning or uses.

Some time ago, thinking of these things, and pondering the ways of God with the soul, it occurred to me to make trial of a little plan, the better to test my

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

faith. Selecting a group of close friends—not pious men, as the phrase goes, but men of all types of mind and training, who have, in some degree, the spiritual quality—I wrote each a letter, asking them to tell me, not why they believe in God, since no man can do such a thing, nor what they think He is, which is beyond the power of words to do; but when does God seem most real, and what is it that seems to bring Him near?

Naturally men are profoundly shy about such things, and rightly so. None of us cares to listen to a man who blabs about God as if He were a man in the next room. Still, though one may sympathize keenly with such a feeling, it is no reason why, between man and man in the air of intimate friendship, we need to be mutes about the highest things. Something of the sort I wrote in my letter, vowing the while to keep all names hidden; and the results were most gratifying, not to say surprising. Men who had boasted that they were "hard-boiled" talked like mystics, and others who professed to be prosaic turned poets. Here are a few testimonies; only the work or calling of each man is indicated, and that, alas, tells little about him.

A LAWYER: It is in the pauses of my work, those little interludes when the rush of things is quiet, when I look out of my window and realize the silent, steady power of Nature; or in the evening when I have a moment to look up into a measureless sky full of stars; or when I see an act of pure, disinterested good-

## WHEN GOD IS NEAR

ness—such as the little angels must run up and whisper into the ears of God to make Him happy; it is at such times that I have a real sense of God.

A PHILOSOPHER: In my mind, besides complete thoughts, and other thoughts which though incomplete admit of completion, I find still other thoughts which it is impossible to complete; they open out fan-wise, and in their implications reach beyond time and sense. Yet they are very real, and in a sense normal and necessary to the healthful working of the mind—such thoughts I take to be the shadows of God in the mind of man.

A BANKER: As you well know, I am ill at expression in religious matters, my faith being very simple. I think that if everyone would every day do some kind act for some one other than themselves, the burden of the world would be lifted; and I try not to wait for the others to begin. It seems to me that such a practice leads directly to spirituality; that is, to an experience of God, who is known not in words but in deeds. The Kingdom of Heaven is next door, but we go the other way.

A JOURNALIST: For me the road to God is through beauty. There is too much beauty in the world for any ends of mere utility. It is this over-plus of beauty that is the best evidence of the existence of God, and the token of His presence. The song of a thrush in the

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

evening, a forest vista in which the slant of trees and the shadings of light are such as to fill the artist with a wild, sad joy; or looking into the face of a flower—its delicacy, its exquisite tracery—make God actual to me.

A BUSINESS MAN: I am bound to think that a real God is working now; so I believe that when I am working wisely and well I am in active coöperation with God. Occasionally I have a feeling of such coöperation; but more often I simply think of my work in that way. If you mean a mystical experience, I fear I must be counted among the "missing." But I consider that one who is really controlled by the thought of active co-working with God has an actual experience of Him.

A JUDGE: There are certain convictions and ideals which are the holiest things I know. It is plain to me that to turn away from them would be to close the door to all higher life and power. If I should betray them, or give them up, my way would be utterly dark. When I realize this I cannot help thinking that these holiest elements of my nature, which are the stars in my inner sky, are a revelation of God, bringing Him near to me.

AN ENGINEER: To me the sense of right in my mind, the moral ideal in my soul, which I did not create and cannot destroy without destroying my very being—the things that arrest me and make me pass moral judgment

## WHEN GOD IS NEAR

upon my thoughts and acts—is the presence of God. If I obey it, a deep, quiet joy fills my heart; when I disobey it I am miserable. The mystery of the moral life, like the peace of God, is past my understanding; and for me at least the two are one. My religion may be stated in the words of Whittier:

By all that He requires of me,  
I know what He Himself must be.

A PROFESSOR: I believe in God, but I have no experience of Him so far as I am aware. I accept the creed of the church and try to live as if it were true; that is all. Yet, I know that something deeper than philosophy lingers in the light, in the song of a bird at dawn, in the loves and fellowships of life, something I can neither define nor grasp; and my hope is that some day, somewhere, that beautiful Something which hovers on the confines of my mind will at last become clear. In other words, as Stevenson said of Burns, I am not as much devoted to religion as haunted by it.

A MAN OF SCIENCE: Every man of us has a shy and lonely thing in his heart which he dare not lose, on pain of no longer being a man. One does not often speak of it, and then only softly; but since you ask as a friend, I will say that it is in the Holy Communion that God is nearest and most real to me. Under the forms of bread and wine God

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

touches me and feeds me. How it can be so I do not know; I only know it is so. Would that I were more worthy of such a blessing; but if I were I should not need it.

There are others, but these are enough to show what I had in mind and what I discovered. Surely it is not argument that counts, but experience; not our thin theories about God, but our contact with Him. After all, who knows whether any of our theories are reasonable or not? These simple words from the hearts of strong men leave me haunted by the thought that God has all sorts of ways and means of making Himself real to us. There are many paths in the Land of the Spirit, and they all lead to one end if we follow them to the end, and that end is God.

While one does not wish to analyze the heart-beats of our fellow men, two things are taught by these testimonies. In nearly every case it is in some lovely little thing, some hush in the rush of life, some interlude of clear insight, that God is near, as of old He was not in the windstorm, nor in the earthquake, but in a voice of gentle stillness. Also, it is always as an intuition of union with Him, or of the unity of life in Him, giving unity and meaning to its parts, that the vision of God comes to help and heal the heart of man.

Such a study suggests a thousand thoughts, one of which is that God must desire every man to have an experience of Himself, but in no two men is the experience the same. A warm, impulsive nature, a cold critical temper, a practical active outlook, promise dif-

## WHEN GOD IS NEAR

ferent experiences of God, in both content and form. Clutton-Brock, with his vivid artistic sense of harmony, and Unamuno, with his tragic sense of discord, must experience God in totally different ways. Each soul hath its song, or sweet or sad, and each must utter its note in the divine orchestration, and go its way to the God of whom it sings.

By the same token, each soul must respect the vision and melody of others, whose music is no less authentic, even if it does not strike our key or cadence. The shepherds, at the first Christmas, did not see the pilgrim Star leading from east to west, nor did the Magi hear the angels sing of peace on earth. Each followed the gleam or melody granted by the good grace of God, and each arrived at the new-born truth, albeit by different paths.

If each is loyal to the vision granted him betimes, and loving with his fellow souls, in a finer fellowship yet to be achieved we may hear, if only for a brief time, an undertone of all-sustaining harmony running through our tangled time, prophesying a fair, far day when sorrow and sin shall cease, and the soul of man shall be free—learning in love the truth it has lost in hate.

For my own part, if I may add my testimony, two things open the windows of heaven wider than anything else. When I read the Life of Jesus, in “the book of white samite, mystical and wonderful”—especially the story of the walk to Emmaus—and feel the unutterable loveliness of his spirit of simple goodness, his heroic sincerity, his exquisite and healing pity, his im-

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

passioned yet serene fidelity to his ideal, even to death and beyond—then God is real and near, at once intimate and august. A radiant personality touches me; there is a human accent as of a friend—the light shines, and there are footsteps by my side.

Next to Jesus, who brings God to me, music is both priest and prophet to my soul, uttering those wistful yearnings which well up in every human heart, vaguely or clearly, but which no tongue can speak. When I listen to the Sanctus or the Agnus Dei by Gounod, or some of the great hymns, or certain strains from the masters, like the Largo, I know the Truth for which words were never made. Then I see a glimpse, if nothing more, of a meaning in the turbid ebb and flow of human misery about me, only the vague shape of a reason that floats in my heart, and melts as quickly away. .

Aye, sometimes, by the mercy of God, when a great organ, with its keys of white and black—like the joys and woes of life—pours out its soul at the touch of a spiritual artist; sometimes life drops its veil, the tumult of time is hushed, those who have vanished seem near—Eternity murmurs on all my horizons, and the noiseless knocking of a Presence is at my Gate. ,

# The Crisis of Christ



*Preached in the City Temple, London, May 14,  
1930, at the Anniversary of the Colonial Mis-  
sionary Society. The Preacher had the honor of  
delivering the Anniversary sermon before the same  
society on May 7, 1918, while Minister of the City  
Temple.*

## THE CRISIS OF CHRIST

*Will ye also go away? Lord, to whom shall we go?*

—John 6:67, 68.

### I

HE EARLY MINISTRY OF JESUS IN GALILEE WAS A SPRINGTIME OF BLOSSOM AND BIRD-SONG. IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT HE returned from the Wilderness of Temptation, his heart aglow, his mind made up, preaching the Gospel of God. Throngs hung upon his lips, drawn by the winsomeness of his personality, the lyric loveliness of his words, and the wonder of his works of mercy. He made men glad about God, glad about life, equally by his incredible approachableness and his understanding kindness, no less than by the warmth and wealth of his vision. In unclouded glory the love and power of God shone in his face, and wrought in his healing hands.

The vision of the Kingdom of God was so vivid in the mind of Jesus, and so radiant in his heart, that he had hope that the people of his fathers would see, hear and heed, and so avert the doom which he saw impending. But, alas, it was not to be so. When he began his work in Judea, at first there was response, and then an icy hostility, an enmity made the more implac-

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

able by the fear that the whole nation might be led off after him. As between the restless political radicalism of Galilee and the rigid religious bigotry of Judea, he did not fit into the scheme of his age. There was no room for his gospel of truth working by love, which revealed the futility of violence in reaching any high social end. His effort to win the synagogue from the Pharisees failed; his attempt to cleanse the Temple met defeat. Before the end of the first summer he knew that with the majority of his generation his ministry was doomed to be misunderstood, and he himself to be despised and rejected of men.

Such was the scene and setting of the Crisis of Christ. It was the old temptation again; and even while the people were trying to press upon his head the crown of rebellion against Rome, he knew that he must walk the high, hard way of the Cross, wearing a crown of thorns. Suddenly he turned and put the fickle, sensation-loving crowds to the test—those who wanted him to turn stones into bread and dazzle them with signs—and if they had been fascinated by his charm, they were staggered by his challenge when he said: “Except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood, ye have no life in you.” Truly, it is one thing to come to the point of religion, and another thing to come religiously to every point. It was a hard saying; the multitudes melted away, frightened by his strange, stern demands, leaving the disciples themselves bewildered and half-terrified. “Will ye also go away?” Jesus asked, ready to be deserted and left alone, as he was at the last. The little group renewed their vows in a kind of awed desperation: “Lord,

## THE CRISIS OF CHRIST

to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."

It was no mere mood of irritation or depression, but a quick and piercing insight into the human realities about him. While his faith in God was serene, he had no illusions about human nature, and he knew that mankind may any day suffer a swift and ghastly slip backward, losing its vision of the best. Jesus, apparently, did not believe in the idea of the inevitability of the progress of man onward and upward forever. He faced the possibility of an earth swept clean of every trace of faith and faithfulness: "When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on earth?" If he told men that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, he did not mean that it will come automatically, by evolution or otherwise. Whether the final attitude of humanity will be Godward or not, he did not say. It can be and may be, though there is neither certainty nor inevitability; and Jesus did not deceive himself. He knew that there is doubt, but he believed that there is hope.

The method of Jesus changed; he abandoned first the synagogue, then his open-air pulpit, and last of all the lakeside itself. In places of quiet retreat he began to tell his disciples of the exodus soon to be accomplished, and to prepare them for it. Over the later parables a shadow falls; we hear of "a far country," of a "great gulf fixed," of a hand at the window waving away guests who have come too late, of an outer darkness, of a son cast out of the vineyard and slain, of a sword that divides father and child, of a cup of forsakenness drained. On the day of his triumphal entry

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

into Jerusalem, Jesus sought to dramatize, in an acted parable, the genius of his enterprise; but to no avail. His disciples thought he had won, mistaking applause for approval, but he knew that he had lost. There was no fruit on the barren fig tree; "nothing but leaves." It was his last appeal to his people, and all that remained was the love that lives on when faith and hope are dead—the Love which endureth all things, and therefore cannot be defeated.

## II

Once again, as in every generation since his advent, it is the Crisis of Christ in our age. Just before the World War, Harnack said in Germany: "If darkness shall ever come over the world, and God and every spiritual virtue grow dim, it may be that the personality of Jesus will save us." Darkness did come over the world, as we well know—darkness and confusion, and the face of God was hidden in a red mist—and the personality of Jesus did save us from utter despair. Again it is an hour of decision and destiny for the church. It is not that we have failed to take Jesus literally; the tragedy is that we have failed to take him seriously. For ages we have had a religion of what others said about Jesus, worshiping an image of him graven by our logic, making a Christ of our opinion and adoring it. The day has now dawned when we must draw nearer to Jesus himself, enter into his mind, obey his law of love, though it lead us to the Cross, and act upon his vision of the love of God and the Kingdom

## THE CRISIS OF CHRIST

of Heaven, or religion, as he taught it, will disappear from among us.

Again the multitudes melt away, disillusioned and distracted, leaving the followers of Jesus in dire dismay. Either we must live dangerously in the world today, making an unprecedented adventure toward Jesus, relying wholly on the guidance of his living Spirit, as at the beginning, or the church will disintegrate. Our ancient contending theologies, and their counterpart in the disunion and woe of the peoples, are doomed; they do not signify. They are not refuted; they are simply passed by and forgotten as having no relation to the life of our age. No, there must be a new advance in faith and fellowship, a new dimension of insight and understanding, a spiritual revolution which will save the world from its recurring disasters of war which break the heart of humanity and blaspheme the name of God. Else religion will be cast aside as an obsolete futility, as it is in Russia, and man will try to build his life upon another basis, with what results no one knows. One thing must be plain to all: religion as we now have it, impotent and uncreative—a mere huddle of sects—is not equal to the issues of this strange, stupendous age.

What is the real issue before our age? Briefly and basically it is the issue between a materialistic, deterministic, nationalistic outlook and the vision of spiritual reality, the ethics of moral freedom, and the hope of world fellowship. Deeper down is the deepest issue of all, whether man is hereafter to think of his life in terms of cosmic meaning and concern, and that

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

involves no less a matter than the life and death of society as we know it. The advent of atheism in our age, amounting almost to theophobia, is not an accident; and it shows that our thought of God has gone tragically awry. It is a new temper, very different from the agnosticism of the last generation, many of whose teachers were exemplars of the devout. Mill, Huxley and Morley were agnostics, but they regretted it. Whereas the modern atheist, glibly skeptical and gaily cynical, proudly affirms that there is no God, and that he is glad of it. A militant atheism will be a blessing if it forces us to take our faith in God seriously and makes us re-dig the wells of living water down to a permanent fountain.

For, without a new vision of God as the unity of humanity in our age, without a deeper experience of God as the truth that makes all other truth true, what hope have we of building a stable peace and a creative good will among men, which is the supreme social task of today? How else can we reach and melt the sinister faith, the dark fear, which dictated the desperate saying of Chiras in the Laws of Plato, a faith held by many good and honest men in our day: that what men call peace is an empty name, since "there is ever between all states a secret war." Manifestly it is faith, and yet again faith, on which our hope rests; faith in a God above man and within man, faith that man exists to surpass himself, faith in the vitality of moral forces and the efficacy of ideas. If our faith fades, if God becomes only the shadow of man cast upon the screen of his fear or fancy, our hope is doomed to de-

## THE CRISIS OF CHRIST

feat. Here again the personality of Jesus, and his vision of God, saves us, keeping alive the faith that there is, at the heart of things, a sure ground of hope and a source of power.

To try our faith to the utmost, at the very time when we are praying and planning for peace, a horde of divisive facts and forces are acutely active. In the small world in which we are now living, its vast distances abolished by the magic of science, the races of men are drawn together, jammed together, and rancor runs rife. In the British Commonwealth this problem is widely distributed, yet not the less urgent, but in America it is at our door and may not be evaded. There is less color feeling, less racial hatred, in Russia than in America. The late Lord Morley thought the race problem in America "insoluble"; and so it is, without a religion of brotherhood. Rabindranath Tagore put the matter pointedly when he asked: "Do you really think that so long as America has such racial prejudice it has any Christianity to export?" If our religion fails here—as, alas, our Protestantism seems well-nigh to have failed in America—it fails fundamentally and fatally, no matter how unctuous and eloquent its profession of faith may be. Can our religion once more bring the races of men together in the glow of fellowship, as it did in its morning years?

As the Russian repudiation of religion in behalf of materialism may help to renew our faith, so the uprooting of humanity in economic and social affairs may force us to put our own house in order. It is not simply a polemic but a portent, and if it looks at first like the

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

idealism of hell, to ignore it is folly. It does turn the searchlight on features of our own economic system which are ghastly in their injustice, and brutal in their exploitation of man by man. It shows, as in a horrible apocalypse, that our selfish, individualistic commercialism, so ready to use men to make money for private gain and luxurious display, instead of using money to make men, is nothing but organized atheism. It is not only un-Christian, it is inhuman. Surely we now know that no society has any secure future but that in which the people, all together, learn to coöperate as part of a common life for the common good. Our hope lies in a practical fraternal righteousness, in which the skill of science is employed to serve the masses of mankind. In short, our religion must first teach us to do justly, then to love mercy, if it is to lead men to walk humbly with God.

By the same token, the moral chaos of modern life warns us that we are at the end of an era, and no prophet can predict what awaits us. One thinks of the lines of Matthew Arnold:

"Ye live," I cry, "ye work and plan,  
And know not ye are severed!"

Severed we are, sundered from a new generation to whom our experience is alien, our sentiment mere sentimentality, our ideas antiquated and our ideals unreal. A wild, sad confusion reigns, an apotheosis of self-assertion and self-sufficiency, a saturnalia of sex obsession in life and literature, a revolt against chastity, authority and restraint. Even our music is troubled, as

## THE CRISIS OF CHRIST

we hear it in the poetry of Eliot, Gibson, Sitwell and Sassoon, to name no other singers. Can our religion sanctify and sublimate the basic instincts of humanity? Can it harmonize and harness them to the service of the Kingdom of God, making its redemption a revelation of a finer morality in which inspiration transfigures inhibition? Can it reknit the marriage tie, broken today like a rope of sand, and save the home, now threatened with destruction?

### III

If these issues have been stated vividly, not to say starkly, it is in order to put a question to your heart and to my own: What have the questions which divide our churches to do with issues such as these? Nothing! Less than nothing! They do not touch the real life of our age; they do not "speak to its condition," as George Fox would say. What wonder that the multitudes melt away, or remain indifferent, when the church is so remote from the problems in which they struggle, and leaves them to grope without guidance. What salvation can the church offer this tangled, turbulent age, speeding its way in a welter of flux and confusion? A private piety, a code of personal ethics, a vision of the Kingdom of Heaven as something to be looked at afar, rather than to be looked for? Can a divided church hope to unite the world? If the church cannot realize the brotherhood of religion in its own fellowship, how can it creatively influence the social order? Can Christianity, as a theological and ecclesiastical affair, ever

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

meet the need of this restless, ruthless, cynical modern world, as the Gospel of Christ grasped the crumbling classic world and reshaped it?

To ask such questions is to answer them to our confounding. In the Garden of Sorrow, on the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus prayed for his disciples, "That they all may be one, . . . that the world may know that thou hast sent me." Here are tremendous words, in which Jesus makes the proof of his person and the power of his Gospel to depend upon the unity and fraternity of his followers. Surely he is dead of soul, or else deaf to the voice of Jesus, who can hear that prayer and not be shaken by its pathos and challenge. Read in the light of Christian history, it well-nigh smites us mute; read in view of the facts of today, it makes the heart stand still. That prayer is literally true. The world will never believe in Christ until those who love him love one another well enough to live and toil together in the spirit of his life and the service of those for whom he died. If the church cannot realize the law of love in its own life, it will be impotent, if not insignificant, in the days that lie ahead, and the faith of Jesus will fulfill itself in other ways, or else be cast aside by a hurrying, realistic world as a vision too fair ever to have been true in the past and too frail ever to come true in the future.

Is it not the Crisis of Christ in our day? Or, rather, is it not the crisis of his church as it falters, hesitates and delays to prove to the world the truth of the faith and fealty which it professes? Is there no power in the

## THE CRISIS OF CHRIST

Gospel of Christ to cut through the cobwebs of custom and immemorial misunderstanding and let the light shine out of darkness into our hearts, "to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"? For half a thousand years, on this Blessed Island, the Body of Christ has been torn by a profound schism, the story of which we know, and the tragedy of which has been carried to the far ends of the earth, even in its missionary labors! Let me humbly bear my witness in the pulpit of the City Temple, speaking both as a Free Churchman and as an Anglican, knowing both sides from the inside, and treasuring the precious thing which each seeks to conserve. Before God and this company of my brethren, I testify that in my own heart they are not divided, but are as the two hemispheres of one Christian world, and what God hath joined together we must not forever keep asunder! Let us treasure both traditions, and reckon them equally holy, equally vital, equally precious; but let us keep in our hearts the words of the Lord Jesus how he said: "Ye do make the will of God of no effect by your traditions!"

Long ago Wesley learned, in his mellow sunset years, that the Love of God is deeper than all dogmas, and that the many words of religion describe one ineffable blessing. Today, if we are to do the work of God in our generation, we must take the whole world for our parish, the whole Christ for our redemption, and the whole church for our fellowship. All exclusiveness must be excluded, as it was in the mind of Jesus who never

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

emphasized a little issue in his life. No partial insight, no limited vision, will meet the need of an age which passes all frontiers and probes all abysses. If we believe—if we really believe—that God is actually present in the fellowship of men who are seeking His Kingdom on earth, then the church can be united by the highest and holiest bond—by the Spirit of God Himself. If we believe this passionately and profoundly, our inertia, our pride, our historic differences about which we make so much ado, aye, even the institutional snobishness and selfishness will give way to the holy will of God. Here, again, the personality of Jesus will save us, when we are willing to follow where His footprints point. Again He will lift us out of our littleness into His largeness, giving us a vision of the Gospel which was the purpose of His mind, the passion of His heart, and the prophecy of His life.

## IV

What of the future? The extraordinary thing about Christianity is that no prophet can foretell what it will do next. It is a religion of surprise, its verity attested equally by its vitality and its variety. Again and again, when it seemed dead or defeated and its faith a fiction, it has recovered some neglected insight or opened a new window of vision, and ushered in a new era. Always the Crisis of Christ is the purification, emancipation and consecration of his church. It will be so in our generation. There are tokens to tell us that we are on

## THE CRISIS OF CHRIST

the eve of the next heroic creative age of Christianity, in which its audacity of adventure and its heart of fire shall be revealed anew. No one can tell what form it will take. Nor is the form important; it is the living spirit that gives the light and power and victory. Old dogmas and obsolete forms will fall away, like dead leaves from the Tree of Life. The only Christianity worth preserving is the Religion of Love, inexhaustible in its ministries and magnanimities.

In an age of cruelty and confusion the Poor Little Man of Assisi heard the words of Jesus, "provide neither gold nor silver nor brass for your purses, nor script for your journey." Wedded to Lady Poverty, he went singing through his age, saving the church from disruption and the world from utter corruption. In an age of superstition Luther heard the words, "the just shall live by faith," and restored the lost sense of the immediacy of God and the rights of the soul of man. In an age of utilitarian complacency, a few heroic men, attempting great things for God and expecting great things from God, in obedience to the words, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," launched the great enterprise of foreign missions. What is the word of God for our age? He that hath ears to hear let him hear! "And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also."

After the passion of two thousand years, on the eve of the nineteen-hundredth Day of Pentecost, let us seek the source of light and power, using the old and

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

simple technique: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." What if the church should dare such an adventure and assemble, as of old, not to legislate but to listen, invoking the power available to faith and prayer and unity, the better to learn the will of God and how to do His work? What if its leaders should foregather, not to argue, not to patch up a platform, but to seek to know the mind of Christ? What if we should go to such an assembly, not as those who seek for victory of opinion, but actually to yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit to be taught by Him what He would have us do? What might not be revealed to us concerning the will of God for our bewildered age, when humanity is astray in its own life, groping its way in the darkness? The early church sought the guidance of God in this manner, and it was permitted it to say what we should be able to say sincerely: "It seemed good to the spirit of God and to us."

The words of Carlyle still flash like lightning in the sky: "The world asks of its church in these times, more passionately than of any other institution, the question —Canst thou teach us or not?" If the old hurt and heartache of the world are to be healed, if there is to be love where now there is hate; if bitter racial rancors are to be cleansed away, if the shadow of war is to be lifted from the life of man, setting us free to create a world fellowship; if the race is to be led toward a juster, wiser, more merciful social order, and the light of the Gospel sent into all the dark corners of the earth; it will be by the union of those who have

## THE CRISIS OF CHRIST

found in Jesus the Way, the Truth, and the Life—by a Pentecost of Love and a Baptism of Brotherhood. Nothing can save the church and make it equal to the tragic necessities of our age, except the power of Him who created it—nothing but the red passion of the love of God and the white fire of His Spirit in our hearts.



# The Return to the Altar



*Delivered in the First Presbyterian Church,  
Philadelphia, at a Conference on Worship, under  
the auspices of the Federation of Churches.*

## THE RETURN TO THE ALTAR

### I

If we inquire of anthropology, we find that from earliest time man has had two basic industries, tool-making and ritual-making, and they give us a clue to his history. The reason why man makes and uses tools is plain enough; he wishes to extend his power and his personality, in order to meet his need and master his world. But why, from the beginning, in all ages and lands, man has made rituals, is not so plain; it is a mystery. Manifestly, at the bottom of ritual-making there is an impulse as fundamental, a necessity as natural, as the making of tools; something profoundly revealing. Ritual is religion in act. As if by instinct man felt that something must be done about God; something to invoke—nay more, to *enact*—His presence in our fleeting life.

Let us not forget that ritual is first in order; and theology follows. One may not be dogmatic, but it would seem that in his sacred rites—sacrifices, sacraments, ceremonies of a thousand sorts, wherein magic and mysticism were blended—man endeavored to complete the sequence of experience. In his rituals he spun and wove a tie to unite cause and effect, trying to find the connection in things. As Bruno said, God is the principle of connection in things, the Meaning to which all facts contribute; and man was seeking God. Ritual, then, is a quest after the unity of facts, the relation of events, the coherence of experience, as over against a mere haphazard existence or the awful miscellaneousness of sheer chance. It is man interpreting

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

life, flinging across its gaps a network of meaning, acting out what he believes it to be, endeavoring to bring himself into harmony with the order of the world, and thus to be at home in it.

If we turn to psychology, we learn that ritual has a dual explanation, causal and functional. The rites of religion, in their origin, we are told, were not so much attempts to placate the gods—though that element was present—as expressions of communal life, celebrations of its great events, such as birth, marriage, and death; an effort to secure its sanctities by social safeguards. That is to say, man sought by ritual to establish communion with the Divine Power—not fully attained, or broken by some sin of his own—and he sought that communion socially, through his group life, repeating in his ritual the order of nature. So interpreted, his ritual is organized mysticism, and as such appeals to the basic instincts of human nature—the desire for self-expression, the creative desire, and the social desire to do things in common with his fellows—seeking to harmonize and harness his elemental powers in the service of the highest life. In short, it dramatizes the faith, hope and spiritual dream of man, giving a reality-feeling to what otherwise easily becomes abstract and unreal.

To trace in detail the varied forms of ritual and cult is beyond my purpose here, as it is beyond my power. But three things strike one in the study of the ceremonies and symbols of humanity, and the first is that worship, in all its forms, is one thing, one in aim and ideal, however manifold its expressions may be. Also,

## THE RETURN TO THE ALTAR

worship is everywhere an effort of man to make himself receptive to such revelation as may be vouchsafed, in order that God, felt to be far off, may be brought near, and that God, feared to be unfriendly, may be found to be friendly. Put otherwise, in worship man seeks to make the universal particular, to overcome the distance between himself and God, yielding himself the while to be invaded, exalted, and commanded by One higher and holier than himself. When, in his early rites, he approached the dark mystery of God, wrapped in cloud and shadow, his worship was abject and awful, involving mutilation and blood. But when he broke through the taboo of terror in safety, there followed an outburst of wild gaiety to which we are well-nigh strangers; an ecstasy in which earth and sky were felt to flow together in joy. From afar we can still feel the thrill of that ancient ecstasy, its ghastly offerings and its glorious liberations.

In other words, worship, as "the practice of the presence of God," so to define it, alternates between negation and realization, between escape and return—an escape of the soul out of the prosaic humdrum of day-by-dayness into a larger, freer life, whence it returns illumined and empowered. At the altar, which is a focus alike of faith and fellowship, man is lifted above the self of every day, with its duties, drudgeries and delusions, into a Self at once more real, more clairvoyant, and more abiding. It is the great emancipation, and as such the supreme adventure of man, the ultimate reach of his soul, and the finest of all arts. It cannot be brushed aside as a mere "defense-mechanism," as it is

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

in the jargon of our day—it thrusts us out on too many daring quests. It cannot be labeled as "self-hypnosis," as the fashion now is, because it liberates too many forces. It is not simply consolation, it is exploration; and its adepts, whom we call mystics, prophets and saints, who run ahead of us up the mountain until they are almost hidden, live the eternal life in these our mortal years.

On its higher level, as we see it in the masters of the spiritual life, worship transcends art, transcends philosophy, and deals directly with the Reality of which all else is symbol and shadow. It discovers another dimension of existence, as Jeremiah, in the midst of trial and tragedy unspeakable, rose above ritual-religion, as on a ladder, above book-religion, into the Religion of the Spirit, with its light and power and liberty, and became "the Christ of the night, the Shadow Christ." If at first it seems to be a withdrawal from the issues and interests of everyday, the withdrawal is only seeming, in order to bring a brighter vision to the darkest task; as Raphael, in his painting of the Transfiguration, shows us on one canvas the shining figure of Jesus on the mountain, and the distracted father and his demon-haunted boy at the base.

## II

'What is worship? A glance at the Lerolle painting of "The Arrival of the Shepherds" on the morning of the Nativity, may give us a hint. The scene is drawn with realistic verity, devoid of halos, but with a penetrating

## THE RETURN TO THE ALTAR

insight into the deepest intimacies and attitudes of the soul. The herdsmen stand huddled against the rough tree trunks which support the roof of the cavelike stable, and over all is the hush of a mingled awe and joy. One shepherd has dropped upon his knees in adoration, lost in wonder, his feeling of unworthiness speaking from his whole body. The second lifts himself on tiptoe, gazing timidly over the shoulder of the kneeling figure in front of him, watching with wistful, inquiring eyes, seeking the answer to the riddle of life in the lighted face of Mary, and the Child at her breast. The third shepherd, the oldest and most thoughtful of the three, has lifted his hand, as if swearing allegiance to a vision he has vowed to serve and obey.

These are the three elements which enter into worship as the ultimate art, Adoration, Inquiry, and Allegiance; and we may think of them in order. When the late Baron von Hügel, one of the noblest spiritual teachers of our generation, was asked to define the essence of religion, he replied in one word—Adoration. The deepest need of man, he said, deeper than duty, honor, or happiness, deeper than petition, contrition, or even thanksgiving, is the mood of adoring prayer, in which the soul is lost in the Otherness of God, finding rest, release and renewal in One who is like yet profoundly unlike itself. Other forms of prayer do not, indeed, disappear from our lives; they are caught up, fused, and united in a detached, disinterested giving of our being to a Being other than ourselves to be cleansed, taught, mastered, possessed. Such prayer yields all, asking nothing; it seeks God for Himself

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

alone, as both the source of prayer and its answer, and the end of all desire. St. Francis used to spend whole nights in an intense stillness, uttering no words but "God! God! God!" loving God, rejoicing in God, surrendering all to God.

As Eckhart said long ago, when we seek God for our own good and profit, we are not seeking *God*. It is religion as an end in itself, like art for the sake of art, which must be our aim and ideal if we would be free; religion God-centered and ineffable. To attain it man may well invoke the aid of every art, striking on all the outward senses of the soul that from dull insensibility it may be awakened to know God and live in Him. The vista of architecture, the spell of music, the fragrance of fellowship help us to achieve "the wise passiveness" of which Wordsworth tells us, wherein worship is listening. They induce pause and poise of spirit, what another has called "a time exposure to God," relaxing the tenseness of thought and lifting us into a wide and quiet place of vision, above utilities and futilities, above the clatter and confusion of life. In such vision-moments the soul, acting as a unity, rises above itself, and becomes spirit; it sees, knows, and sings. Deeper impulses emerge of which we have hardly been aware, new openings appear, old memories mingle with new meanings, as our whole being goes out to God in awe and joy. One such hour of insight and self-escape, lyrical and luminous, shows us more of what life is and what it may be than all the sages know.

At so high a level of adoration we see life in truer

## THE RETURN TO THE ALTAR

perspective and proportion, as from a mountain height, and read its flying days in a clearer context, no longer clouded by our lower, shadow self which obscures the truth. Its problems of faith and duty are plainer as we think of it from the inside, religiously, with deeper insight and a wider outlook. The gentle, troubled singer of the Seventy-third Psalm, vexed by the arrogant prosperity of evildoers, felt his faith wavering and his feet about to slip, until he went into the sanctuary. There, at the altar, a longer view was unveiled, and he saw the swift end of wicked men and the futility of their devices. There we, too, must test our lives by One who is the Arbiter of every perplexity and the Author of every pure ideal, lest we sink imperceptibly into the shame of the second-best; we who so easily forgive our own faults and flatter our own vanity. The Bible calls it confession of sin: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and see if there be any evil way in me." It is a kind of Divine psychoanalysis, so to name it, yielding the harp to its Maker to be tested and tuned, which is far better than letting human fingers fumble among its delicate strings. Such an inner inquiry, if it be honest and fearless, tries us by a standard other than our own, revealing our besetting sins and our self-defeating traits in a white and healing light.

By the same token, as Tennyson said in a shining line, we needs must love and follow the highest when we see it, drawn equally by its beauty and its mercy. Nay more, by the holiest compulsion of our being, by the sway over us of spiritual ideals, we renew our vows on our knees, as a Roman officer, in the *sacra-*

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

*mentum*, repeated his oath of obedience every year. Thus at the altar of worship, in the sacrament of faith and fealty, we celebrate in a holy rite the vision shown us in the light of a purified spirit, swearing allegiance to its pure service; whence we return to the hard task of the day, or its bitter tragedy, with a clearer insight and a stouter loyalty. Alas, because we are frail and faltering, fitful in our faith and fortitude, we must return again and again to the place of hearing and healing to renew our vows. Nor are we safe until, by a high habit of heart, we have ordered and established our lives in strength and quietness; and that is why the art and practice of worship, as an act of emancipation and consecration, is so vital to the best life of society and the soul. It is not a luxury but a deep necessity, if life is to have inward unity, direction and grace.

### III

To describe in this manner the nature of worship is to reveal the appalling need of a return to the altar in our tangled, crowded, hurrying, unworshipful age, wistful and cynical by turns, when men have well-nigh despaired of finding any clue to the unity of life or any key to its meaning. If there is to be a recovery of religion, if we are to recapture its lost radiance, if it is to renew its creative and expansive vitality in our generation, it must be by the way of worship, its supreme art of adventure, exploration and interpretation. Yet the conditions of life today, its hectic pace, its hideous noise, its obsessive externality, its lack of rich

## THE RETURN TO THE ALTAR

inwardness, its clutter of things and its confusion of voices, are a conspiracy against the ancient command, "Be still, and know that I am God." Such is our dilemma, as if we had all gone astray in our race for the means of living and lost the meaning of life.

Life today is an endless round of alternating strain and diversion; our labor is largely with the external, and there we seek, also, our recreations. It is an age of the crowd, of mass-movement and mass-thinking, in which the individual seems insignificant. Few know how to be alone, much less to live by their inner resources. The wealth and variety of the things we can do contrasts pitifully with the poverty of what we are. Day by day we live under a terrific pressure of stress, one duty handing us on to the next, as a pail of water is passed down a long line of men fighting a fire. As some one has said, it is not we who do our duty, but duty that drives us to get itself done. Harnessed to the way and will of the world, harassed by its hot haste, we live by compulsions from without and not by initiatives from within, and when free of the grind we know not how to pass our time. In no age has the soul been so enslaved, so caught and caged in a net, lost in the mass yet unable to be alone. It is no wonder that spiritual reality seems unreal, and men grope blindly, fumbling after some thread of all-sustaining truth, some way of unity in the midst of a maze.

But unity, alas, eludes us, living as we are in an age of specialization, when life is cut into pieces and patches for inspection, its students working in isolation in different fields. The cultural whole of other times has

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

been shattered, and lies in the disarray of a temple yet to be built and built upon. Who understands Einstein, or Epstein, or even Gertrude Stein? Who knows how Whitehead gets his destination, or what the expressionist drama expresses? There is no one mind today, but many minds, as divergent as they are inarticulate. Our specialists do not understand each other, yet specialists they must be, each with his own technique and dialect, since no one can follow the whole field of vision. Never again will any man be a "master of those who know," as Aristotle was in his day, and Aquinas later. Such a synthesis of thought is impossible today; the volume of knowledge is too vast, too varied. Our only hope of a way out is by a spiritual synthesis, as in the mind of Lincoln "the Union rose to the sublimity of a religious mysticism," to use the phrase of Stephens; as in the ample vision of Whitman, the greatest mystic the new world has known, our prodigal and abundant America found transfiguration and interpretation. Unless we can attain to such a vision of unity in the universe as religion seeks to realize, the meaning of life is lost in a medley, as it is for so many in our day.

For religion, to say it once more, is an experience of union with the whole of life, which gives unity and meaning to all its parts. Here, no doubt, is the secret of the trend toward a richer, more colorful, more entralling worship, as we see it in the emphasis on Gothic architecture, in more stately liturgies, and in the flood of books on the spirit and art of worship which pours from the press. In so far as this movement means a release from the tensions and weariness of a machine

## THE RETURN TO THE ALTAR

age, seeking power with which to meet victoriously its issues and demands, it is prophetic of blessing. But if it be merely a "pattern of escape behavior," an effort to evade facing in a realistic way the problems which confront us, avoiding moral perplexities and social realities by taking refuge in a dreamy emotionalism or a fine-spun mysticism, it means not only defeat but disaster. The priest is needed as we return to the altar, but also the prophet with his merciless moral criticism and his flaming speech, and the tie between them must be kept taut. Otherwise, as history warns us, there will be a lack of balance and a tragic loss of power and vision.

## IV

If we are to walk the way of worship we must use all our wisdom and all our wit, avoiding many pitfalls, seeking God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind, seeking holiness with our whole being. Worship is, first of all, an attitude such as every soul must, in its highest and truest moods, always assume in the presence of this amazing universe; an attitude of wise wonder in front of such a mystery, of exalted humility before One in whose great hand we stand. It is the harmonious activity of our highest faculties, and for that reason the highest happiness man can know. Never does earth rise so high, or heaven bend so low, as when we worship, and nothing so transfigures life, purifying it of fogs and fears, lifting it above the flats to which our daily toil tends to drag us down, opening new vistas of insight and outlook.

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

But worship is more than an attitude; it is an atmosphere in which the heart is made pure and the mind clear. Air is one thing, and everywhere the same, but an atmosphere is charged with a quality of its own, benign or blighting. There are thoughts which we do not think in the holy atmosphere of the altar, imaginations which take flight at the mention of the name of Jesus. Finally, worship is more than an atmosphere; it is an act, solemn, specific, sacrificial, not merely a conception but a perception of God, not simply a yearning but a yielding of the whole being, in deliberate and utter self-surrender, to One higher, wiser and holier than ourselves. In his later Catholic years Newman wrote a letter in which he tried to tell some of his old friends the meaning of the Mass, from which we may learn much, though it may make our more reflective worship seem uneventful and idle—

"The Mass is not a mere form of words, it is a great action. Words are necessary, but as means, not as ends; they are not mere addresses to the throne of grace, they are instruments of what is far higher, of consecration, of sacrifice. They hurry on as if impatient to fulfill their mission. Quickly they go:—for the whole is quick; they are all parts of one integral action. Quickly they go, for they are awful words of sacrifice; they are a work too great to delay upon, as when it was said in the beginning, "What thou doest, do quickly." Quickly they pass, for the Lord Jesus goes

## THE RETURN TO THE ALTAR

with them, as he passed along the lake in the days of his flesh, quickly calling first one then another.

"Each in his own place, with his own heart, his own wants, with his own thoughts, with his own intentions, with his own prayers, separate but not concordant, watching what is going on, uniting in its consummation. There are little children there, and old men, simple laborers and students in seminaries, priests making their thanksgiving, and there are penitent sinners, but out of these many minds rises one Eucharistic hymn and the great Action is the measure and scope of it."

Thus, in a high and holy act, whether swiftly or slowly, blending the mysticism of fellowship with the awful individualism of each soul, together we seek the One whom we need the better to serve and bless the Many who need us. To sum up, worship is to life what distance is to art, what the measureless is to music. Here, under the hospitable roof of God, life reveals its true proportions and dignity, and we recover its vast backgrounds. Here, with the mystery of Eternity moving to and fro in our hearts, we see the real values of life, and our oblique judgments are corrected by reference to Divine ideals. Here our hearts melt in song, and those ineffable truths which on other days seem dreamy and dim renew their reality, and we dare to read the meaning of life by what is highest.

For the rest let us never forget—what has been so

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

often and so sadly forgotten—that the most sacred shrine on earth is the soul of man; that the temple and its offices are not ends in themselves, no matter how old and stately, but blessed means to the end that every human soul may become “jubilant and beholding,” as Emerson would say, cleansed of evil and crowned with the glory of a God-illumined vision; that every human heart may be an altar of faith and hope, a sanctuary of purity and pity, a cathedral of serenity and gladness.

# Religion in Public Affairs



*Delivered at the opening of the Institute of  
Public Affairs, University of Virginia.*

## RELIGION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

*Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things which are God's.*

—Matt. 22:21.



S THIS IS ONE OF THE FEW OCCASIONS IN THE LIFE OF JESUS WHEN, IN ANSWER TO A DIRECT QUESTION, HE DEALT WITH A POLITICAL issue of his own time, it is fitting that we study it. Doubly so because of the wise insight involved, and as a kind of prelude to the agenda of this Institute of Public Affairs in which sundry issues of vast import are to be discussed. The mind of our time is cloudy as to the relation of religion to public affairs, and if it can be clarified in the light of the mind of Jesus, we may find the guidance we so much need.

Of course our Lord was aware of the motive of the inquiry, and the effort to entangle him in the mesh of partisan feud and perhaps entrap him to his hurt. No matter; as on other occasions he gave wise answers to foolish questions, so here he gave an honest answer to a question manifestly insincere in its asking. He met the issue squarely and confounded his critics, but he did more. He took advantage of the opportunity not only to adjudicate on an issue acute in his own age,

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

but also to set forth a truth for all ages. If his critics were adroit, *he* was profoundly wise.

Even the manner of his reply is worth study, as showing his clear eye for facts. He recalls his critics sharply to the realities of the case by asking for a penny and inquiring to know whose image it bore. His meaning is obvious. It is idle to discuss the right of paying taxes to Cæsar when they were enjoying the protection of Cæsar, since the right of coinage implies the authority to levy taxes; a principle acknowledged to be valid by the later Rabbis. That is to say, the question in respect to Cæsar was to be answered not by a fantastic theory, but by the acceptance of facts and the exercise of good sense.

But Jesus did not leave the matter there, else he had done little more than expose the hypocritical malice of his foes, while he evaded the gravity of the issue. Besides, he would have been siding with the Herodians, who were content to accept a subject princedom as a sufficient realization of the national hopes, and enjoy the privileges and powers which such a policy brought. He pointed out that the claims of God were equally imperious and not to be denied. In other words, he gave a spiritual answer to a practical question, and in the end no other kind of answer is valid or wise, since at bottom every great issue of life is spiritual. No doubt his foes took his words about God as a mere pious gesture, as so many are wont to do in our day, though we are beginning to see, dimly it may be, but more clearly than formerly, that the spiritual factor cannot be ignored.

## RELIGION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Before we take up the principle of Jesus regarding religion and public affairs, let us not forget the wisdom of his general abstinence from such matters. It takes little thought to see that the relevance and value of the Gospel for us is due to the fact that Jesus dealt with the perpetual needs of men, and not with their transitory and local perplexities. When he did depart from his usual reticence it was to deal with issues neither local nor secular merely, but recurrent, perpetual, and universal, and he gave most illuminating decisions. Had he done otherwise, he would have become hopelessly entangled in the feuds of parties and sects in his own day and land, and would have little light for our guidance in this far-off age and land. If he touched upon local issues, as he did in a few instances, it was because he saw in them questions which, in one form or another, needs must recur to vex and baffle men of every age.

As a fact, there are no more than five such questions dealt with in the recorded teaching of Jesus, and it is worth while to name and state them. First, "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," in which he lifts a vexed issue out of the region of the arbitrary, rigid and non-natural into the free and vital necessities of human well-being. Second, "not what goes into a man, but the things which proceed out of the man defile," in which we are shown for all time that in relative importance it is first the moral, then the ceremonial. Third, "what therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder," in which he sums up once for all what is implicit in marriage, making the

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

spiritual tie the secret alike of its sanctity and its security. Fourth, his answer to an apostle who sought to justify his intolerance toward a Christian worker who was not of the company following Jesus, but who cast out devils in his name: "Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is for us"; which disregards ecclesiastical irregularity in the interest of spiritual loyalty and human service. Fifth, the passage now before us, which sets forth the nature and validity of the claim of the state to the obedience and support of its citizens.

How, then, shall we interpret and apply this last saying of Jesus which defines both the duty and the limitation of citizenship? As a command, for such it surely is, requiring all who would obey him to render to Cæsar his due and to God His right. It does not mean, as it may at first appear, that Cæsar and God are rival rulers, because Cæsar is a servant of God, whether he knows it or not. Nor does it mean, as some seem to think, that the world is cut in two, divided between a practical worldliness and a thin otherworldliness. Jesus did say that his kingdom is not of this world, but he sought none the less to establish it on earth, as he taught us to pray in the little liturgy which he gave us for our daily use; and not only to pray but to work. If we join this saying of Jesus with the words of St. Paul, when he said that "the powers that be are ordained of God," perhaps its meaning will be clearer. By the "powers that be" St. Paul meant the Roman Empire—of which he was a citizen and under whose protection he lived and labored—the empire established by the military genius of Julius Cæsar and the

## RELIGION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

statesmanship of Augustus. It was ordained of God, said St. Paul.

Surely he was right, since it was almost the first attempt to unify and organize the world upon a basis of law, its far-flung power making the world one, just as its great stone roads brought the ends of the earth together. Back of this saying of St. Paul lies a profound philosophy of history, which sees that the will of God is worked out in the life of man only as fast, and in so far, as man works with the Eternal Will. Put concretely, the Roman Empire was the form which the will of God took in that age, because man was not ready or willing to receive a finer form—God must wait for the developing capacity and wisdom of man. In other words, each age, each nation has as good a government as it deserves, or is ready and able to receive, whether it be an oligarchy, a monarchy, or a republic. By the same token, all men, certainly all Christian men, must strive by every art at their command—as individuals and in their collective life—to make the state more perfect, more responsive to the will of God; and by so much is the Kingdom of Heaven set up on earth and among men.

If we ask how this philosophy—or faith, if we call it such—worked out in the events and development of history, the records of the ages tell us. It took three forms, the first of which was when the Roman Empire tried to destroy the religion of Jesus. By a sure instinct the Roman rulers felt, from the first, that the Gospel of Christ was an enemy to their power. The refusal of the disciples of Jesus to put their Master on

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

a par with other gods in the Pantheon, and still more their refusal to bow down to the Emperor as a deity, confirmed the suspicions of the Roman authorities. Yet the effort to obliterate the religion of Jesus, frightful in its severity, failed utterly. Clearly a new influence, a new force—a strange power called weakness—had been released among men, which even Rome could not defeat.

At last the religion of Jesus, so far from being destroyed, captured the Roman Empire, and became the state religion by law established. If it seemed a gain, it was, alas, also a terrible loss, because it meant compromise, the dimming of a vision, the coarsening of what was fine, and a surrender of its real supremacy. Still, it must have been ordained of God, because, as Rome reeled and staggered to its fall, the church dropped into the saddle of the Cæsars, held the world together, and saved civilization from utter collapse. Anyway, the union of church and state continued, with varying vicissitudes of good and ill—often so mixed as to be impossible of disengagement—all down the ages until the founding of our Republic, an event the full meaning of which we do not yet know. In the New World a new beginning was made, dividing history into before and after, as regards the relation of church and state and the public ministry of religion.

At the University of Virginia, his pride and the idol of his "later, wiser years," as he called it, there is no need to tell the story of the heroic fight led by Jefferson in behalf of a free church in a free state. It was memorable and magnificent, and its results are no less

## RELIGION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

benign because they are taken for granted, like so much else won for us in the past at so dear a cost. Still, we ought to remember that in the buffer states of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, to call them such, there was less need for such a struggle, due to the wise Dutch and to the gentle folk of the Society of Friends, who founded their early communities upon a basis of absolute freedom and toleration. Indeed, it is not too much to say that no single group in our history has been more fruitful of good than the Society of Friends; and its influence has been out of all proportion to its size—touching with intellectual and spiritual fineness so much of the life, literature and legislation of our land.

Nor is it necessary, even if it were possible, to attempt to trace the creative and restraining power of religion in the public life of our nation. Such an undertaking is beyond human competence, since we cannot measure such forces, but we know that it has been vital and formative; and that, too, in spite of the ever-present temptation and tendency of a false otherworldliness to abdicate the right and duty of moral criticism, when it has not actually tried to provide religious sanctions for social selfishness. In the past—as in our own day, though happily in less degree in later years—religion has been lamentably content to serve as an ambulance cart, following in the wake of industrial and military strife, when it ought as well to have been thundering, like the old prophets or like St. James, at the strongholds of tyranny and injustice which were so many.

In these despites, the power of religion in public

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

affairs in our land has been mighty, and it is not to be wondered at. Surely he reads history to little account who does not know that the two great forming agencies in the story of man have been the Religious and the Economic; and it always will be so. Here and there the ardor of the military or the artistic spirit has been for a while predominant, but religious and economic influences have nowhere been displaced from the front rank even for a brief time; and they have nearly always been more important than all others put together. Because this is so, truly the crux of all our social problems is to get these two factors—the Religious and the Economic—into right relations. Here, as elsewhere, the Bible, if we are wise enough to listen to it, will be our best prophet and guide, because its religion was revealed in the midst of a great struggle for social justice, and if rightly studied and used it will be a lamp to our feet in a troubled time.

If now we look more closely at the facts and forces of our own age and land, what is the truth revealed? One thing, at least, is true; the separation of church and state does not and must not mean the separation of religion and public life. Rather it should manifestly mean that the church is set free from the shackles of the state the better to serve its own high, prophetic purpose. Yet there is need of clear thinking and careful handling in such matters, if we are not to do injury while we are trying to do good. Just now it is said, not for the first time, that we must not "mix religion and politics," and there is truth in the saying, though much depends on who says it, why they say it, and in

## RELIGION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

what tone of voice. If it means that religion is merely private piety and has nothing to do with the social and public life of man, it is false.

For some of us the words have a familiar echo, taking us back to the days when we were fighting the saloon, when we were told to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven and not mix in politics—as if the Kingdom of Heaven had nothing to do with a moral and social pesthouse! No, what was meant in those days was that religion should betake itself to another world and let the saloon run our politics, as in fact it did, with what results we know. Indeed, it ran our politics with so high a hand that it finally hung itself as high as Haman, and its effort at resurrection today will be abortive. If only we did mix religion with politics—the religion of purity, justice, honor, and brotherly kindness—our public life would be nobler, finer, and more fruitful for the common good.

None the less, as has been said, there is a sharp truth in the saying that we ought not to mix religion and politics, in so far as it means that the church should be a place of worship and not a weapon of warfare. To win a temporary gain at the cost of a permanent injury is bad bargain. Efforts are always afoot—sincere and high-minded, but misguided—seeking either to use the state to enforce the moral precepts of the church, or else to use the church to coerce the state. Already we have gone further in both directions than it is wise or safe to go, putting in jeopardy the rights of the minority as well as the rightful influence and work of the church. Ardent minds, impatient of moral suasion, if they have

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

not actually lost faith in it, may easily do more harm than good. A great prophet-bishop—God in His mercy does sometimes allow a prophet to become a bishop, in spite of the church—has recently said:

"Measurement and publicity are the best weapons for social redemption—precise judgments according to a standard and the publication of the results. The church has exalted standards which it can use with increasing precision, and it has organs of publicity. Anything beyond this—lobbying, propaganda, political maneuvers—may well be subjected to scrutiny, especially when we are tempted to enter into coöperation with some evil forces against other evil forces. It is in my judgment imperatively necessary for the church to fight now as never before against the liquor traffic, but I am becoming increasingly uncomfortable about some of the alliances the church is at least half-way forming in this warfare, such as those with political parties and reactionary commercial and industrial organizations. If we get the devil to pull the cart, it will go at his pace, over his road, and in his direction. At the very least, such policy of co-working begets in the church too kindly a sentiment toward allies of doubtful moral standards. I know a farmer who shot a watch-dog that had become 'too friendly.' "<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Francis J. McConnell of the Methodist Church.

## RELIGION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

This, plainly and picturesquely said, means that the end does not consecrate or justify the means, but that right ends may be delayed, if not defeated, by wrong methods. In other words, if we are ever to build the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, it must be by heavenly means and methods. If we try to do it by earthly methods—by repression rather than creation, by organization rather than inspiration, to say nothing of statutory substitutes for character—we fail utterly and in the nature of things. Even the force of righteousness cannot make men righteous until they are ready and willing to yield to it, else the power of God would have made men righteous long ago. God works from within outward, and only in His way can we build His Kingdom on earth. At first it seems a slow way, requiring a long time—and so it does—just as it takes a long time to grow a tree; but in all high matters the slow way is the quickest way, because it is the only way.

A famous and far-reaching instance will bring this truth to a glow-point. Gandhi is a spiritual splendor in our generation, a voice to echo in the ears of men, a vision to haunt their hearts, long after the principalities and powers that oppose him are but dust blown by the random winds. Yet, when Gandhi set up a boycott against the British Empire—using a force none the less powerful for that it was passive—he did what Jesus refused to do. Jesus, too, was a member of a subject and tormented race, but he fought only with the weapons of the spirit. Folly? No, because he released an influence which, in the end, saved the good Cæsar

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

had done. Fute? Apparently, but not so in fact and the outworking of events. Today both wisdom and truth are ranged on the side of "him who is the eternal symbol, sacred even to those who question his very historicity, of the lonely might of the spirit opposing itself to the federated forces of the world."

How does this strange might of the spirit, as elusive as it is ineluctable, work and after what manner? Let us see. Macaulay tells us that the evangelical revival improved the quality of cloth woven in the mills of England; but it is not of record that it improved the conditions under which the weavers worked. But, happily, in the mid years of the last century, the spirit of God moved upon the hearts of a group of the elect, Maurice, Kingsley, Ruskin, and others. When Maurice said, "I confess the sins of my age as my own," there was born a sense of social solidarity so vivid that the physical misery of the many became the spiritual torture of the few; and there was no rest until wrongs were righted. Our hope lies in an increasing spiritual sensitiveness, an ever more vivid social imagination. Together they will make war intolerable, and the Golden Rule a necessity in the life of man.

No one can read the words of Jesus, much less follow in his footsteps even a little way, and not discover that he lived in a world of which Cæsar knew nothing. All the strange powers of the soul were assembled in him, held in harmony by a sanity of mind and a purity of heart, transfiguring the dark mystery of life with meaning and mercy. The unseen, unknown empire of the spirit, over which the legions of Cæsar had no

## RELIGION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

authority, was his dominion. He heard the voices of the world; he read the heart of man; he reached and ruled that inner realm where abide the issues of life and destiny. His dazzling conception of the Kingdom of Heaven has no equal in its depth and grasp and grandeur. It has in it the breadth of the sky, the curve of the earth, and all the journeying years. The dream of Cæsar was vast, but the vision of Christ is vaster. All the wandering races of men are embraced in his humane and heavenly vision of a redeemed humanity; and he saw in a far time his vision fulfilled.

Cæsar ruled from without; Christ reigns within. At the center of humanity he sits enthroned, holding forever his scepter of love and pity and joy. Men follow for love of him, led and lifted, they know not how, out of hate into love, out of doubt into faith. And thus the ages have followed him with song and art.

The glory that was Greece,  
And the grandeur that was Rome,

have vanished, have melted into the stream of time, but the power of Christ grows and abides, and will have no end. Cæsar died and Rome decayed. The state can restrain, it cannot regenerate. Something deeper is needed, something that softens and purifies the heart of man, and builds a temple in the secret place of the soul.

Cæsar needs Christ to fulfill his dream of an ordered world; and Christ needs Cæsar too—his large world-mind, his high heroic quality, his fine practical capacity—if the Kingdom of Heaven is to be set up on earth.

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

Our spiritual-mindedness must become public-mindedness; the skill of science and the power of religion must work together; and faith must be translated into truth. These things shall be, because the Power of Love is greater than the love of power, and in the long last Love cannot fail, for God is Love.

# Our Neighbor



*Commencement Sermon, State University of  
Iowa.*

## OUR NEIGHBOR

Luke 10:25-37.



ONE CAN READ THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN IN A MINUTE AND A HALF, READING DELIBERATELY; AND YET IN THE LIVING wisdom of the world there is no story that touches life more vitally or with a more sparkling vividness. It begins with a debate about a point of theology, but it is soon giving first aid to a wounded man by the roadside. If it has to do with the question of Eternal Life, it ends by paying room and board at a hotel. So practical is religion in the mind of Jesus; so near are eternal realities to the affairs of everyday.

The story was told in reply to a man who thought it much easier to love God than to love man. He was willing to be neighborly, but he wanted to select his neighbors. He thought that some line ought to be drawn, some limit set beyond which one is not required or expected to go. There are many who want religion to be a kind of limited liability company, lest they be too deeply involved. But Jesus drew no lines and set no limits to the duty of man to help man. He wanted the lawyer to know that his neighbor was the man next to him who needed his aid, wherever he might be, regardless of race or religion.

There is no need to say that the story was told by

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

an incomparable artist; it is a picture painted by the twist of a wrist. Dipped and dyed in the colors of human life, no essential fact is omitted, no unnecessary item added. Even the lawyer agreed that his question was answered neatly and completely, with no possibility of evasion. The scene is located on a lonely road where only God saw what went on. No audience was present to modify any motive. Each man acted out the actual spirit and principle of his life, uninfluenced by anything outside his own heart.

### I

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho is steep and dangerous; it descends three thousand feet in twenty miles, from the shoulder of Mount Olivet to the Jordan valley. In imagination one can see those bandits hiding in a limestone cave, their dark faces silhouetted against the cliff, waiting for their victim—symbols of the black fringe of crime on the borders of society. When the hapless traveler came in sight, they leaped out, surrounded him, beat him into insensibility, took his money, stripped him of his clothing, and left his bleeding body at the side of the road. They intended to kill him, because dead men tell no tales. Cruelty is one of the most distressing and depressing facts in life. It was a bloody, brutal business.

But that is "rough stuff," to use the touch-the-spot language of our day. One does not have to break a man's head to be a bandit. One can break his heart. One can break his home. One can break his business.

## OUR NEIGHBOR

One can subtly and cynically break down his religious faith. One can besmirch his good name, and destroy an honorable reputation built up through long years. Every day men are robbed of things far more precious than gold. The amount of polite banditry and refined cruelty that goes on in the world is appalling. Many a man respectable in society and in the church is nothing but a bandit, and would be so described if we called things by their right names. Alas, too often success softens criticism and muffles speech. To put it plainly, any man who deals with his fellow man for what he can get out of him and nothing else, is a bandit.

One of the greatest of German thinkers laid it down as a principle, in tune with all the teaching of Jesus, that to treat a human being as merely a means to an end, no matter how high and holy the end is supposed to be, is immoral. It does not matter that such a principle throws a white and searching light upon much that we are pleased to call civilization, it is none the less valid. To think of working folk as so many "hands" and nothing else, forgetting that they are immortal souls, precious to God and for whom God died, is immoral. To think, even if we do not speak, of young men as "cannon fodder," is a ghastly and cynical sacrilege. Of course we are shocked when some blunt man blurts out the brutal truth, stripped of the glamour of sentiment and fine phrases. As one of the characters in *Saint Joan* said, it would horrify us if we could *see* what we think about as it really is.

The two men of religion in the parable have been the targets of scathing scorn, and rightly so. But let us

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

be careful, lest we impale ourselves before we know it. One was a Priest, who hardly glanced at the wounded man by the road, and passed on, hurrying to the Temple to take up his office. In his mind a misplaced collect in the temple service would have been a serious matter, but he could leave a fellow man in dire plight without a qualm. The hypocrite, we are ready to say. But we have no right to use such a word. Jesus might use it, because he knew the human heart as we do not. No, the priest was not a hypocrite, not conscientiously so at any rate. He honestly did not see any connection between religion and the service of humanity. To him religion was the rhythm of a ritual. He thought that God lived in the Temple, listening to prayers and hymns. It did not lie in his mind to think of God as brooding over a broken man by the roadside.

Not long ago a friend of mine was preaching at Harvard, and he closed his sermon by quoting a stanza of the stately hymn, "In the Cross of Christ I Glory." After the service President Lowell asked him if by any chance he remembered who wrote the hymn from which he had quoted. He did, lucky man. He said it was written by Sir John Bowring. The president pressed the matter by asking if he recalled when, where, and under what circumstances the hymn was written. He did not remember, if indeed he ever knew. The president told him that it was written at the very time when Sir John Bowring was forcing opium down the throats of the people of China at the mouth of the British cannon. It seemed incredible to my friend, but in the afternoon he and the president looked it up and found that it was so.

## OUR NEIGHBOR

A hypocrite? No, it was a blind spot. Sir John Bowring saw no inconsistency in writing a noble and tender hymn in praise of the Cross of Christ with one hand, while with the other he was engaged in an infamous undertaking. He saw no connection between his private spiritual-mindedness and his public life. He was not pretending to be religious in order to make political capital out of one of the most frightful iniquities that ever cursed mankind. Such an explanation is too simple, too easy. His piety was fragrant and sincere, but he honestly did not see that it had anything to do with his public acts. To Sir John Bowring, as to many another man, religion was an inner ecstasy or peace, an escape from harsh reality, a merciful cleansing from acts required by his position from which his better nature may have revolted. There are many such. It is a strange astigmatism, but before we condemn it let us be sure that we are not afflicted with it. For my own part, I have too many blind spots to pass judgment upon others. Only in recent time have we begun to see that religion and life are one and the same, or neither is of any worth. For, manifestly, if piety does not issue in human service, in juster laws and a more merciful society, its dogmas are a delusion and its ritual a rigmarole.

Take the example of the Earl of Rochester, of whom Macaulay tells us. In order to influence James II for political purposes, the Earl employed a dissolute woman to whose charms the king was susceptible. Yet at the very time of the intrigue, Rochester was writing in his diary devout prayers and exquisite spiritual medita-

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

tions, with no thought of the public—they were found among his private papers. A contemptible hypocrite? No, it was the same ghastly gap, the same horrible hiatus which has made so much of the tragedy of history. Men are not as wicked as the things they do. The pages of history are blacker than the hearts of the men who made history. With merciful clarity Jesus saw that men do awful things without seeing or knowing what they do. "Eyes they have, but they do not see," he said. How many tragedies it explains, how many bigotries and brutalities it accounts for. Most of the cruel wrongs we inflict upon each other are the blows and blunders of blindness.

The Levite who passed by the wounded man in the parable was a musician, a member of the Temple choir. At least he did stop and look at the unfortunate man in his misery—that is, he made a survey of the situation, as we are apt to do. Indeed, it is a fad today to make such surveys, to gather data, to count the number of babies that die undernourished in city slums, filing the report for future reference. No doubt such surveys are needed, and their findings have value as information; but it is a pity to do nothing about it. Who will say that the stinging rebuke of a poet about "organized charity, scrimped and iced, in the name of a cautious and statistical Christ," is not deserved? The Levite got the facts, and he may have reported the incident to the Temple authorities when he arrived in the city; but that was the end of it. Nothing was done to help the man in desperate need, and the bandits were left free to attack the next pilgrim who journeyed that way.

## OUR NEIGHBOR

The attitude of the Innkeeper toward the wounded man in the parable was a purely professional one. He was paid for his services, and rightly so. There is no intimation that he did not take good care of the unfortunate man, or that he overcharged the Samaritan, who agreed to pay more if need required. Without the inn and its keeper the Samaritan could not have cared for the victim of the bandits. He was away from home, sixty miles or more—something in the story makes one feel that he was going in the opposite direction. He had no facilities for relief. The inn may stand as a symbol of the hospital, the orphanage, the asylum, the home for the aged—all the benign agencies with which we care for the wounded and world-broken. Such agencies did not exist in the time of Jesus, but they hallow the earth today, largely through his influence; and within their beneficent walls the finest skill of science is brought to the service of suffering humanity.

What shall we say of the Samaritan? We do not know his name. He did not advertise his philanthropy. He found a fellow man in dire plight, wounded, helpless, by the side of the road. He was a man of another race, another religion. No matter; he picked him up, gave him such immediate aid as he could, put him on his own beast, took him to the next inn, and paid for his keep. He did the natural, fundamental human thing, made a clean job of it, and went on about his business. Truly did Mohammed say that when man will not help man the end of the world has come. Certainly the end of the human world has come when the most basic obligations are ignored, for whatever reason. The bottom

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

drops out of society. There is nothing upon which to build. If religion fails here, it fails fatally and becomes a mockery.

To us the very word Samaritan is like incense in the temple of humanity, by virtue of an artless act enshrined by an inimitable art. But to the lawyer to whom the parable was told it was not so. Upon his lips the word was a term of contempt and scorn, describing a man of a mean and mongrel race. To call a man a "Samaritan" was the worst thing he could think of, like some of the words we are wont to use—Jap, Chink, Dago, Nigger! With exquisite irony Jesus made a Samaritan the hero of his story, finding in the breast of a despised outcast man an alabaster box of precious ointment with which he anointed a fellow man in distress—as if to show us the loveliness which humanity hides from us because we do not love it enough. Alas and alack, bigotry blinds us to brotherhood, and racial snobbery robs us of beauty. How much unguessed, anonymous goodness there is in the world, if we look for it. Without it human life would rot and fall to pieces.

## II

The Samaritan befriended a man of another race, forgetting ages of profound, unreasoning antipathy; and here the parable speaks to us. Upon this earth there is no human fact more dark and terrible than racial rancor. It is a thing slithered with blood, a breeder of bitterness and the mother of wars. What havoc it has wrought! Yet even in America, of all places on earth,

## OUR NEIGHBOR

it runs rife, making an undertone of irritation in all of our larger communities. It mars private fellowship, it poisons public life. Such a spirit is alien to the whole genius of America, if we remember that our country, in its settlement and development, is a racial symposium, in which many peoples took part, each adding something precious to the commonwealth. There is room for everything in America except hatred, upon which nothing can be built.

One has only to study the providential strategy in the history of America to see that it is a great fraternal enterprise. Eight nationalities set sail on the *Mayflower*, a ship so well advertised that one would think that no other boat ever sailed the seas in the brave days of old. Seventeen nationalities took part in the settlement and development of our central eastern states, like Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York. It was fortunate that we had such buffer states between the psalm-singing Yankees in New England and the fox-hunting squires of the South. By happy fortune the population of the central states along the far-flung eastern coast line was made up of folk of many races, and that made for toleration and fraternity. The oppressed and persecuted of many lands took refuge among us, finding a more liberal and kindly fatherland.

Later, men of many races poured in upon us, flooding our land. As early as 1650 eighteen languages were spoken on Manhattan Island, and today there must be eighteen hundred—it is a polyglot boarding-house of the human race. All of us remember the sentimental talk of a Melting Pot, a striking phrase which became

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

a thought-saving slogan, until we were suddenly awakened to racial realities. According to this curious fancy America was meant to melt many races into one, after the manner of the old button-maker in *Peer Gynt*, and make a new kind of man; whereas the result would surely be a monstrosity, as undesirable as it is impossible. When this foolish fiction exploded, we were well-nigh frightened out of our wits by racial facts to which we had been blind. Alas, fear begat hatred, as it always does, and all the old rancors returned to torment us.

What we need is not amalgamation but brotherhood, not a melting together of races but fellowship—a sense of the sanctity of unlikeness and the value of different races and peoples as adding to the richness and picturesqueness of life. Each race has a genius of its own, and by that token a treasure to contribute to the community, if we have the insight to see it and the sense to value it. In America the religion of brotherhood is not a theory, or a fine phrase, but a necessity; and here the Gospel of Jesus, in which fraternity is vital and fundamental, meets our need. If Jerusalem was the city of Faith, and Athens the city of Philosophy, and Rome the city of Law, and London the city of Liberty, then New York, the great city of the future, must be the city of Fraternity.

America is not a New England, as so many think; it is not a new Europe; it is a New World. Never since time began has there been such a flowing together of peoples from the uttermost parts of the earth and the isles of the sea. For that reason America must know

## OUR NEIGHBOR

no Saxon race, no Teutonic race, no Slavic race, but only the Human Race, of which it is actually a symbol and, prophetically, a symphony. Never has there been such an adventure in fraternity, so many races living so close together on equal terms—brothers by necessity, as they must at last learn to be in spirit and purpose. There is no room in this land for hate, prejudice, or contempt of man for man, if we are to build a Beloved Community, in which many races mingle without rancor, and many faiths without feud.

For, remember: the Samaritan was merciful in his ministry to a man of another religion, and here he has something to say to us. Next to racial rancor, religious bigotry—to use a contradiction of words—has been the most terrible scourge of mankind. Even in America we have always been bigoted and narrow-minded in matters of religion, to a degree almost unbelievable. Those who came early to our shores to escape persecution did not hesitate to persecute others. In New England a man had to be a Congregationalist, or he was not allowed to vote. In Virginia, if he was not an Episcopalian, he suffered many disabilities both as to his life and his goods. Gentle-hearted folk of the Society of Friends were put to death on Boston Common, not for any crime, but for their religious beliefs!

Once more, it was in the buffer states that a better spirit prevailed, due in no small part to the Quakers, led by Penn, who held that "men who fight about religion have no religion to fight about." In New Amsterdam the Dutch planted their wise principle of tol-

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

eration, making it a haven for the harassed of the earth. Even Peter Stuyvesant, whose theology was as unbending as his wooden leg, knew how to live and let live, to think and let think. At last, led by Jefferson, the spirit of toleration was written into the organic law of the land, and we have a free church in a free state. At any rate we have a democracy of religion, in which all faiths have equal rights. The religion of democracy lies ahead of us, awaiting a spiritual interpretation and expression of American life and ideals. It is a pitiful picture at present, sect set over against sect, some of them small enough to be insects.

Surely the religion of brotherhood must begin with the brotherhood of religion. But it must be unity, not uniformity; fellowship, not fusion; fraternity, not mere federation. Just as we do not want all races melted and run into one mold, neither do we want the various religious communions merged into one mush of concession and compromise. It would mean the impoverishment of all, each losing its distinctive grace in an indistinguishable blur. There is an old Wiltshire song that I used to hear in England—

If all the world were of one religion  
Many a living thing should die.

Toleration is not enough; what we want is insight, appreciation, understanding, by which the unique and precious treasure of each communion becomes the consecration of all—each bringing the wine grown in its vineyard to the Cup of the Universal Communion.

## OUR NEIGHBOR

### III

The Good Samaritan wrought his work of mercy and went on his way, leaving a blessing and benediction upon us. The question asked by the lawyer was answered, but a larger problem was unsolved. Alas, the road to Jericho was just as unsafe the day after the robbery as it had been the day before. The bandits were still at large, ready to prey upon any luckless traveler. The Samaritan, alone, could not capture and punish the robbers. It was beyond his power. No one could do it. Today, we carry the principle of the parable further, or else add another dimension to it. While taking care of the bruised and broken by the wayside, we organize, set up an office in Jerusalem, and unite to clear the whole region of bandits, making all roads safe for any who may use them on their lawful avocations.

No one race, no one nation, no one sect can do the big things that need to be done in the world of today. Only a creative coöperation of many races and sects can meet the issues that confront us. It is not a dream; it is a desperate necessity and fact. If, for example, we are to abolish war, before war brings the civilization built up since the fall of the Roman Empire down in a charred and smoking ruin, it must be by mobilizing the moral intelligence and practical capacity of the race. It must begin with the recognition of the fact that the good of mankind as a whole does actually exist, and that no race, no nation, can be happy and secure alone. For this we need the brotherhood of religion, by the

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

grace of God flowering into the religion of brotherhood, in which the good of all shall become the duty, the prayer, and the labor of each.

Only, such large issues must not thin our thought out until it melts into a mist of vague sentiment with no grip upon facts. It is idle to talk of world-unity, if we cannot keep the peace with our neighbors—least of all when the world has shriveled to the size of the noisy, gossipy neighborhood, in which the races live next door to each other. It is futile to dream of a fellowship of faiths, if in our own community we cannot worship God each in the way his heart loves best, while working together for His Kingdom. The priest in the parable was no doubt intent on saving the world, but he did nothing to save one man from despair and death by the wayside.

The power of an endless life, about which the lawyer asked Jesus, is not a vague something off up in the sky, remote for the dust and tragedy of human life. It is life here upon earth from day to day, since eternity is now,\* like the sky which begins at the top of the ground; a life of faith, of love, of duty and mercy and joy. It is one with all dear fellowships, with every tender tie uniting us with those we love; and wider still, with every growing bond of justice and pity and hope which binds us with humanity, by which every man who needs is a neighbor and should be discovered as a brother. And it is by living a neighborly life in these short days of sun and frost that we come, at last, to know “our old neighbor, God.”

# The Next Step in Religion





## THE NEXT STEP IN RELIGION

*And he made as though he would  
have gone further.*

—Luke 24:28.



ODAY, AS OF OLD, A FIGURE IS STANDING AT THE COTTAGE DOOR AT EMMAUS, MAKING AS THOUGH HE WOULD GO FURTHER. HE IS A Pilgrim Christ, and the history of Christianity is the story of his journey adown the centuries, a commentary on the words, "He appeared unto them in another form." Only, alas, as at Emmaus, he is not recognized, and men do not know who is leading them until he is leaving them—to continue his great errand in the world. Humanity, if left to itself, would stand still, dwell in a cottage, and keep Christ with it; but it cannot be, though he will tarry for an hour to bless the Bread of Fellowship.

Evermore the wind is on the heath, and the Great Adventurer makes advance into new lands and new times. All through the years we trace his footsteps; in the joyous heroism of the early church, with its "strange power called weakness"; in the five centuries following—the formative period of theology, when the issues of faith were thought through; in the Middle Ages, rich in art and full of beautiful and strange personalities; in the Reformation, with its affirmation of the

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

sanctity of the home, the worth of personality, and the competence of man in religion. Often the sky was overcast and the way dim, but that shining Figure was ever on before, beckoning a laggard church to follow.

By its very nature the Gospel of Christ is an expanding, unfolding power in the life of man, revealing new wonders as "the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns." Only, we must remember the profound paradox in the words of St. John, confirmed many times in the history of our faith: "Whosoever advances and abideth not in the teaching of Christ hath not God." Advancing and abiding, liberty and loyalty—in that sign the church has conquered in days agone. Ardent but misguided leaders break with the truth as it is in Jesus, but their movements end in futility. Always the power of renewal emerges from the deep heart of the church itself, not from the outside, as so many imagine; and so it will be in the ages ahead. An outstanding fact of our day is the number of choice spirits who have broken with Christian tradition only to find themselves in the presence of Jesus, and enthralled by his personality. They have rejected many dogmas about Jesus, but they dare not reject him, since he has the words of eternal life. But, alas, such souls are few, since the plain fact is that most of those who hold aloof from the church do so because they do not want to be disturbed by the claims of religion, or plagued by its ideals. The fortunes of Christianity and the church are almost, though not quite, one.

Today, as in other days, a living Christ is trying to lead a timid, fearful church into a new age of adven-

## THE NEXT STEP IN RELIGION

ture and enterprise; but it holds back. Always it has been so. Winslow reports of John Robinson, the pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers, that he "bewailed the state and condition of the Reformed Churches, who had come to a period in religion, and would go no further than the instruments of their reformation—as, for example, the Lutherans; they could not be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw. And so also the Calvinists—they stick where he left them. For though Luther and Calvin were precious, shining lights in their times, yet God hath not revealed His whole will to them, and were they now living they would be as ready and willing to embrace further light to that they had received." Those words might have been written yesterday or this morning, so true are they to the inertia of the church, and its desire to stay where its last leaders left it. Man, even Christian man, if not totally depraved, is at least totally lazy, or else is the victim of fear.

Never was the truth set forth more picturesquely than by Joseph Parker in his striking sermon on "Faith Self-Enlarging," in which he shows that faith of necessity must grow, by its own inner logic, and that it is only real when it does grow. His text was the words of Jesus to the men of his day who professed to believe in Moses: "Had ye believed in Moses ye would have believed in me"; because a living faith will recognize its own fruits and fulfillments in new forms of faith. A faith, if it is alive, always modernizes itself, catches the last vision, the last phase of revelation. Faith is not final; it is a beginning, a dawn, a seed, a spring with many summers in its heart. A church does not really

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

believe its own creed until it is willing, and even eager, to add to it, restate it, following it into new revelations and applications. Today a new vision of God is transfiguring a changing church which professes to remain unchanged, and denounces the changes—as in all the past.

Much has happened betimes; a world-view is passing away, and the inner ideal and outlook of man has altered. Besides, a wild storm of war has swept over us, shattering old dogmatisms and optimisms, and leaving a black swirl of wreckage in its wake. The hearts of men are deeply troubled, wanting to believe but finding it difficult. Our age has an intense, eager, wistful longing for spiritual reality, for a more satisfying sense of God. Men want religion, but they do not know where or how to get it. Often they seem to want its consolations without its high commitments, its delight without its discipline. But they want it, knowing that the human problem will not work without the spiritual factor. There has never been so vast a force of incipient spiritual activity, to be influenced for good or ill, as there is today.

Yet, oddly enough, if religion attracts, the church repels. An obsolete sectarianism no longer expresses the real religion of our time which, so far as it reveals itself, is more a practical mysticism than a system of dogma. There is not a sect whose original reason for being is valid today, or whose central insistence has any relation to the actual issues of our time. The differences which divided our fathers are not resolved; they are forgotten. They do not signify. Such debates

## THE NEXT STEP IN RELIGION

seem idle alongside the acute sense of injustice—social, racial, industrial—which festers in the very souls of people of all ranks, rich and poor, high and low. One detects an eclipse of faith in the hearts of many in the church, who carry on by the momentum of memory and habit; a pathetic scanning of the sky line for a new portent, a strained intentness of listening for a new accent of faith. What an opportunity for a pilot-voice at the prow of our Ship of the Spirit, sailing in new and strange waters!

Alas, temporarily at least, we are deadlocked between an archaic orthodoxy and an arid, negative modernism, both alike impotent to deal with the problem of redemption in its tragic and gigantic modern setting. One abides but does not advance; the other advances but does not abide. One looks backward and loses the vision of the Pilgrim Christ; the other tries to trim a titanic Christ down to fit its fastidiousness. Modernism, as it now stands, is no more a Gospel than were the meditations of Marcus Aurelius. A plague on both their houses! What we need is a further step in religion, an altogether other dimension of faith and fellowship, if we are to get on with the Christian enterprise. Either we must go forward to a greater Christianity or be forced out of religion altogether by the tide of cynical materialism now flowing—losing, first of all, the loyalty and service of a generation of virile and educated youth.

Is Christianity dying, as Arnold Bennett and others tell us it is, almost as if it were a bit of good news? Yes, of course it is, though for a reason they do not

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

understand. It is the genius of Christianity to die, like its Master, and rise again radiant and new-born. Evermore it must die to outworn forms of creed and rite, and rise to a new vision of Truth; must die to its narrow sectarianism, and rise to a sense of the unity of things which differ; must die to an inadequate individualism, and rise as a "Beloved Community." We are on the eve of great change and advance; new ideas of the spiritual world and its laws are at the door. Men of spiritual awareness detect a spirit moving in the currents of our time, like the Ezekiel vision of a spirit in the wheels, prophesying a new demand of the human soul. More light will yet break forth, if we have eyes to see and a heart for high adventure in the fellowship of him who is going further.

What is the next step in religion? We have tried dogma, and it involves us in endless debate, and bigotries unbelievable. The time is at hand when we must advance from philosophy to fellowship, *from Faith to Love*; because religion is love, as God is Love, and faith attains reality only in love. The word *Credo*, *I believe*, does not solve the crossword puzzle, unless we add the word *Amo, I love*, in which Jesus summed up his Gospel. "Love one another"—how much, how long, how far?—"as I have loved you." There is the measure, the standard, the prophecy of our love. If only the arms of Christ, still outstretched on the Cross, might be unloosed to clasp us in one embrace and draw us nearer to his heart! Then we should know a truth deeper than dogma, holier than ritual, and as inclusive as the love of God, uniting us in a creative, coöperative,

## THE NEXT STEP IN RELIGION

invincible fellowship. Here truth, goodness and beauty blend. Love in thought is Truth; love in action is Goodness; love in expression is Beauty. Love is indeed the fulfillment of the law, as it is the confirmation of faith and the realization of life, wherein liberty and loyalty join with "the deep power of joy."

But is love enough? Something deep and drastic is needed, as all agree, if the church is to meet the issues and master the demands of our day. No restatement of dogma, no rearrangement of machinery, will do. A vague otherworldliness, with its cult of selfish ecstasy, is as impotent as the effort to make up in "pep" what is lacking in prophecy. No, there must be a daring and heroic advance *from Truth to Power*, if our quest is to become a conquest. A line from Unamuno, the Spanish seer, may give us a hint: "My religion is to know the truth in life *and the life in truth*." Truth we have in richness, truth enough to set us free from all our ills, once we know how to release its pent-up power and how to use it. St. Paul said that the Gospel is "the dynamite of God unto salvation," and it is equal to all the wild forces of an age of reaction and revolt, as it has been in other ages gone by.

How can these things be? One of the richest books of recent years is the *Selected Letters of Baron von Hügel*, who pondered much on our plight and pointed to a way out. A mystic by genius and experience, he was also a philosopher, and not unaware of science and its meaning. He knew that God is not only the supremely spiritual but also the supremely concrete, as Lotze was wont to say. He saw that the older

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

mysticism, by seeking absorption in the abstract, became hazy and empty, despite many white flowers of the spirit which it grew. By the same token, if we adjourn the mystic quest of the Eternal, our religion becomes earthy and heavy. Science and mysticism belong together, he said, as twin activities of the soul, each to correct and confirm the other. The tragedy of our age is that they are at odds, whereas they ought to be the two wings of the human spirit. If we obey the law of the power, the power will obey us. Men of science are trying to tap the atom, or the ether, seeking new sources of energy. Just so we ought to learn that the law of the spirit brings the life that is in Christ; and that life is power—even the power of an Endless Life.

If we turn to the New Testament we find that the key-word is *power*, and its echoes fill us with awe. Jesus spoke with power, and his words had the force of deeds. He was more than the Truth, he was the power of Truth, evoking new energies and new capacities, it almost seems, in the life of man. In his fellowship men found themselves able to do what hitherto they were unable to do. There was a new mastery of old tyrannies, and ancient enemies—sin, disease, fear, death—were flung in the dust. So it has been, in some degree, in all the great ages of the church; and such power awaits our use when we seek it and are ready and worthy to use it—power from on high to lift our feebleness and failure. Nothing can save the church and make it equal to its task today but the Power that created it. The vast and restless mood now upon us may be divinely intended to drive us back from secondary

## THE NEXT STEP IN RELIGION

methods and devices to the source of consecration and conquest.

Only such love and power as were in Jesus can lead our faith *forth from Dogma to Deed*, making the church a center of unity and service, in which men live together as sons of God in gladness and good will. The religion of Jesus is love, comradeship, fellowship, ministry, or it is nothing. It is not first a theology, but a friendship. If it is impossible for men to unite in the love of Christ, then Christianity is impracticable, and had better be given up. But it will not be given up. Sooner or later the church will realize the will to fellowship and draw to itself those who are worthy to be called the disciples of Christ. Unless the power of Christian love fulfills itself in the church, healing our envies, rebuking our schisms, and melting the bigotries that blind us to brotherhood, how can it influence the structure of the social order? Our business is not to do something *for* the church, but to do something *with* it.

Here is the challenge of a sad and distracted age to the followers of Christ today. Are we ready to meet it? The words of Jesus are as true of a church as they are of an individual: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." As Edward Irving said long ago, what our age needs more than all else is a "demonstration of a higher style of Christianity—something more magnanimous, more heroic, than this age is accustomed to." That is to say, what we need is an adventurous church, daring to make trial of the law of love first in its own life, and then in its ministry to human need. Let us

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

give ourselves to it utterly, nor think it too great an achievement for the church of today, with its plodding and faltering advance toward the prophetic vision of the Love of God that cannot fail!

Where is Christ in the tumult of our time? The answer is, look for him where the struggle for justice is fiercest, where human need is most piteous, where the tragedy of life is sharpest—look there and you will behold, as in the fiery furnace of old, a form like unto the Son of Man. There, too, is our post of duty and of danger, if we are to make the church truly Christian—that is to say, a sacramental fellowship of those who love in the service of those who need. Evermore our Leader makes as though he would go further, and still further, along the Road of the Loving Heart—a Pilgrim in the twilight, in his hand the nail-prints of the Cross, in his heart the hope of the world.

# When Christmas Comes





## WHEN CHRISTMAS COMES

*He took a little child, and set him  
in the midst of them.*

—Mark 9:36.



HAT IS CHRISTMAS, IF IT BE NOT A PROPHECY OF A TIME TOWARD WHICH BOTH FAITH AND WISDOM POINT? FOR ONE BRIEF DAY, SO swift to go, another spirit broods over us, healing our broken hearts and jarring wills. Strife, anger, and vanity fall away, awhile we live in a gentler world where love is law. If it might abide with us it would be well with our humanity, and pity and joy would walk the common ways of life. But, alas, we are not ready for its simple faith and wise humility, and the day is gone while the welcome is still on our lips.

Yet it means much, it means everything, to have a prophetic day, symbol of the Eternal Child and "the cradle endlessly rocking." It is needed in this hard world, if only to keep alive the souls of us, and to renew our faith in things well-nigh forgotten. May it flourish to the confounding of all unkindness, in a time of bitter cynicism and blurred ideals, when men play lackey to fear and put their dreams on allowance. It brings us back to the profounder faith, free of the shadow of old Night and the dread of the Morrow. It takes us down from our towering pride, and teaches

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

us humility and sweet charity. Aye, it rescues us from our own tyranny, and gives us hope that we may find our lost child-heart again.

For, even in fairyland no one ever heard such a story as Christmas tells; it must be true, because no one could have imagined it. Beside this tale, every romance in the world is tedious and tame, and the record is as amazing as the history: the perfect art of the story fits the perfect poetry of the fact. Only an ultimate art, nobly artless, is equal to such audacity of insight and a truth so fantastic. If, as Keats tells us, beauty is truth, and truth beauty, no other evidence of its authenticity is needed. It is beyond human invention; only God could have dreamed it.

### I

What a story—as incredible as it is ineffable—telling how, in a tiny town, in a stall in a stable, under a singing sky, at “the end of the way of a wandering star,” God was born a Babe, bringing a new pity and joy into the life of man, dividing time into before and after! Once aloft and aloof, cloud-robed and shrouded in awe, God drew near, striving to enter our fleeting life, trying all doors, and finally making Himself small as a little child and lying down on the doorstep of the world, until the world, moved by the cry of a Babe, opened the door that had been barred to threats and thunders, and took the Child in. Was any story ever more fantastic, at once more impossible and more enchanting!

It is unthinkable, say the wise—knowing not what

## WHEN CHRISTMAS COMES

they say—because the Infinite One who inhabits eternity cannot take the form of man. But God is not truly great unless He can reveal Himself in little things, in a cozy room and a hearthside, in the love of the home and the family. If He is too high to be lowly, He is too small to be God. Love is lost in immensities; it comes in simple, gentle ways, and that is why, on Christmas, religion is so homey and full of caresses, showing how we are "caught in the coil of God's romances," and held in His arms. Hence the joy that sets the world singing, and a haunting loveliness in the heart; warm, tender, glad. God did not come a giant to little folk; He took our tiny shape and let us hold Him in our arms.

If there were no Christmas, our idea of God might be august and awful; it could never be homey and happy. A God who revealed Himself only in suns and systems would remain remote; He could never be intimately near. Such words as "eternity" and "infinity" chill our spirits and make our minds reel. They tell of a God who sits in silence on the far away hills of wonder, dim and unapproachable, a dweller in the distance. But Christmas reveals a Little God, joyous and gentle, at once eternal and humble, nestling in the heart.

If, stated starkly, the story reads like a leaf out of a fairy-book, we must remember that only the thinnest of veils divides fairyland from the truth. Alas, the veil may be as thick as a stone wall, unless we have kept something easily lost in the rough ways of the world, as a page from a well-beloved book will show. In the *Journal of Amiel* we meet a man sensitive, shy, smitten

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

with the malady of thought, and often sad, albeit rich in varied insight. One entry tells of the tumult of his mind as he finished reading Schopenhauer, now so much in vogue, as if the petulant pessimism of the philosopher had infected his spirit. It left him all awry, groping amid dim dogmas, cloudy creeds, and a wisdom that is not wise. When he asked himself, as so many ask today, "What, then, do I believe in?" he did not know. Then, suddenly, in the depth of his heart he felt a stir, and heard the laugh of a child:

"Folly! I believe in goodness, and hope that goodness will prevail. Deep within this ironical and disappointed being of mine there is a child hidden—a frank, sad, simple creature, who believes in the ideal, in love, in holiness, and all the heavenly superstitions. A whole millennium of idyls sleep in my heart: I am a pseudo-skeptic, a pseudo-scoffer."

Ay, happy is the man deep down in whose heart the gay laugh of a child—free, trustful, joyous—makes his grim, gray philosophy foolish. It is to a hidden child in us, sleeping but never dead, that the story makes its appeal, and that is why, when the clouds are off our souls and we are most truly ourselves, free from the pose of being wise, we know that it is true. The highest truth is never known by logic, but by love. God is an artist and does not hang His pictures in a cold, dim light. The life of God, which is beyond our ken, may be more like the heart of an unspoiled child than a king on his throne, to whom cringing men bow down.

## WHEN CHRISTMAS COMES

There may be nothing in the universe, even with its light-year measurements, greater than the love that forgives a penitent man and binds up a broken heart. So Jesus taught—he whose generation and affinity are with elemental and eternal things—and by following him we come at last, not to the child that once we were, but to the child we never yet have been.

### II

For, in a true sense, the urge into childhood, as it is called, is not backward but forward, not a return into an old but a growth and unfolding into a new childhood. After all, children, as some one has said, are rather symbols of youth than youth itself; they are unconsciously young. Whereas, in later life, if we be truly wise, we have the power of converting the symbol into the reality, and of being young and knowing it. As Jesus told us, unless we become, *not* little children, but *as* little children, we shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Such words should give us pause, since Jesus, whom our age is trying so hard to understand, so often insists that unless we have the child-attitude toward God and life and man, we cannot even see His Kingdom, much less enter it.

Put plainly, if the words of Jesus mean anything, they mean that if we are losing—or, rather, if we have failed to attain—the spirit of the child, we are losing the Gospel, or can never find it; losing it utterly, and need to be born again, as the Teacher told the grave and courteous scholar who visited him by night, if we are

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

to regain or find it. Our scholarship, it would seem, of which we are so proud, is quite futile. Some artist ought to paint the puzzled look on the face of Nicodemus when he asked how a man, who is old, can be born again, and the sweet wonder on the face of Jesus, who was astonished that a teacher of faith should not know what he meant.

Here, no less, is the pathos of our generation, with its bright, brittle, bitter sophistication, and the tiresome egotism of an all-analyzing self-consciousness which has brought it to the verge of spiritual paralysis and futilitarianism. It is fascinated with Jesus, haunted by him, pitying and patronizing him by turns, trying to know him but failing, finding his mind naïve, childish and primitive, and his faith in a divine Father an infantile complex. Yet even those who have broken with the Christian tradition find themselves in the presence of Jesus, unable to escape him, enthralled by his personality, as if he knew a secret which our super-cleverness has missed, and without which life loses its meaning and luster. Evermore Jesus passes by on his errand, and men follow his figure with wistful eyes, but not with their minds and feet.

Life is in little fragments today, set under a microscope for inspection—when it is not being flung on a screen so that we may watch our heart beat, note its score, and check its response to injected stimuli. Actually, we have a race that knows itself and is so fascinated with the knowledge that it cannot stop looking at itself. There is no longer any privacy, scarcely sincerity—all is pose and posture. Jesus warned us not to do

## WHEN CHRISTMAS COMES

our alms or prayers to be seen of men, but, alas, that is the least of our troubles—the awful trouble is that we do everything to be seen of ourselves! Has a self-conscious self-knowledge robbed us of that wholeness and simplicity which alone makes Jesus intelligible? Has his word, "The kingdom of heaven is within you," taken up by the devil of introspection, become not a haven but a horror? Have we looked into everything and through everything so long that we now overlook the little door that leads into the land of Christmas where love is just love, and beauty is just beauty?

### III

To say it otherwise: can the sophisticated modern mind, so wise in its own estimate, so mature in its own judgment, and so emancipated, ever enter into the simplicity, the humility, the wonder and sweet wisdom of the Jesus way of thinking? Most of the elements in its make-up run exactly counter to His faith and the spirit of His life. Take the story of Tolstoi, so typical of our restless age, going without arriving, seeking without finding; a great, God-haunted soul—the man was humanity!—to whom the most terrible shadow was not death, but the meaninglessness of life. After trying everything, after going everywhere, and finding neither truth nor peace, he turned to Jesus, as all must do, sooner or later. But, alas, unable to become as a little child, like Dostoievski—who kept, or won, the child-heart, and saw all souls as troops of little children, some with dirty faces and bedraggled frocks—

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

Tolstoi came to Jesus not in humility, but in humiliation; and so missed a great secret. Let us not chide Tolstoi; his quest is also our quest, and happy is he who finds. There is mystery enough in life to rebuke the proud, and light enough, if we follow the gleam, to revive the spirit of the humble.

If the wise and witty mind of our day, so bewilderingly intelligent and capable, will not bow at the Manger, like the Magi of old, what has it to offer? Surely it dare not give up the quest and resign itself to the religion of despair, lest its own wisdom be impeached as the ultimate folly, ending in obfuscation. It is only fair to ask that it set to work to discover a meaning in life, or to invent a meaning for it, else we all fall together into a hound's ditch. For, if life is futile and without meaning, by the same token our zeal to know about it is futile and silly, since the true is no better than the false, both being vanity. In the past Wisdom might dwell in an ivory tower, aloof from direct interest in actual life, a kind of umpire of its issues. But that is no longer possible, if only because the very value of Wisdom itself is in debate, and it must defend its tower. For the first time the real issue is clearly seen, and may not be evaded: the fact of an adequate value in life, and a valid worth in human effort, is as much an issue for the wise men of the world as it is for those who follow the Christmas star. Which way, then, lies the clearest light and the truest vision?

For some of us, something in the spirit of Christmas makes it plain that the cocksure sophistication of our day is pathetically superficial, its glittering clever-

## WHEN CHRISTMAS COMES

ness profoundly stupid, and its towering pride tragically pitiful. As one listens again to the old, immortal story, and sings carols that echo adown the ages, the scene which many think is only a fairy-dream which we have agreed to dream for a day, and then forget, seems nearer to the truth than all our dim philosophies, if only because it does not seek too high for what is near by.

After all, perhaps the most awful error of our smart and giddy-paced age is that we have mistaken knowledge for truth, and cleverness for wisdom, and have forgotten to distinguish between the "childish things" which St. Paul said should be put aside, and the great childlike things which abide, and to which we owe the strength and sanity of life.

## IV

By an odd freak of fact, the men in our day who are nearest to the spirit and mind of Jesus in their method and approach are men of science. Long ago Huxley said—the older Huxley, not his descendant who shows us in an exquisite art the humor, irony and pathos of futility—that the words of Jesus, "Except ye become as a little child," are the most perfect description of the spirit of science in its search for reality. If a man would know scientific truth, Huxley said, he must sit down before fact as a child, eager, humble, teachable, rich in wonder and pure in heart; and such a spirit is no less the secret of finding the truth of faith. And it is the glory of Christmas that it makes known a truth

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

which can never be uttered, but can only be incarnated and acted.

To the man of science, to say it once more, the simplicity and wonder of a childlike faith is no difficulty; it is his habit of mind and heart. In his laboratory today he is like *Alice in Wonderland*, only his findings are more fantastic. Nor is he averse to imagery as an aid, since his world-view is far remote from that of the rationalist, with its neat logical perfection, and he must be content with imperfect symbols of truth, if that is the only alternative available. For example, the Rutherford-Bohr atom is an inherently impossible entity; but every physicist believes in it as the best picture, so far devised, of ultimate facts. The only alternative is to feign contentment with a mass of dynamical equations, which mean little and suggest nothing in the absence of the mental image of the atom.

In other words, as a man of science has to content himself with conceptions which are consciously symbolic, inadequate and lacking even in consistency, so a religious man is justified in adopting a childlike faith, unless some more perfect knowledge is available to him. And if, in exchange for such a faith, he is offered the commonplaces of thought, or high-flown metaphysics, or dull dogma decked out in fine phrases, a sound instinct will justify him in rejecting it, trusting a deeper prompting, and knowing that the time when he need no longer "see in a glass, darkly," has not yet arrived. Nor may he hope to find an imagery of reality at once more intimate and august than the Christmas picture,

## WHEN CHRISTMAS COMES

with the brooding beauty of Mother and Child, and the white star of the ideal in the sky.

For, unless our race is love-lifted and star-led, what hope have we that war will ever end, and the slum be cleansed, and mankind attain to a collective life that is just and merciful and full of joy? There is no valid fact against a great-spirited coöperation of nations and races but this, that we have a childish fear and lack a happy, childlike faith in the impossible things, which are alone worth the doing. Like the boys and girls in the market-place, whom Jesus watched at play, envy, spite, greed, petty pride, and, above all, jealousy—these are the real obstacles to those brave large reconstructions, those daring brotherly feats of generosity that will yet turn human life—of which our lives are tiny parts—into a glad, gracious and triumphant fraternity all around this sunlit earth.

Ages ago Julian of Norwich, whose name is still as fair and as fragrant as a blackthorn against a sky of vivid blue, and as tender as mother love and child trust, wrote this line: "To me was shown no higher stature than childhood"; and all the great mystics agree with her vision. They know what Jesus meant when he said: "Whosoever shall receive a little child in my name, receiveth me; and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth him that sent me." George MacDonald, who was half a child and half an angel, tried in his *Unspoken Sermons* to expound that text, and failed—inevitably so, because it is a white truth which human words discolor!



# The Challenge of Lent



*In Appleton Chapel, Harvard University, the  
first Sunday in Lent.*

## THE CHALLENGE OF LENT

*Create in me a clean heart, O God;  
and renew a right spirit within me.*

—Psalm 51:10.



HIS IS THE MEDITATIVE SEASON OF THE CHRISTIAN YEAR, WHEN THE THOUGHTS OF ALL LOVERS OF CHRIST LOOK FORWARD TO THE Passion Week, and its commemoration of the great sacrifice. As men realize once more that their hope is rooted in divine suffering, a certain instinct in them recoils from self-indulgence. For that is what Lent implies and involves, if it be taken seriously and in a mood befitting its solemnity and beauty. It is a challenge to honest inner inspection and the cultivation of those disciplines of the soul without which spiritual reality may become as unreal as a mirage. The ancient saying, "The beginning of wisdom is the desire for discipline," is as true in the art of life as it is in the life of art.

No doubt to the sleek modern man, with his worship of comfort, it may seem absurd that any mortal should forego a dinner for the sake of his soul. To me, even in its crudest aspect, it is eloquent of the fact that man does not live by bread alone. Surely any man, to whom the Garden of Gethsemane is more sacred than the garden of Epicurus, must be arrested by the spectacle of millions of his fellows setting themselves to

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

face, even for a brief time, the duty of self-denial. Admit that Lenten forms often obscure the idea they seek to embody, and that merit is too easily attached to means rather than to ends, it is none the less impressive. Abstinence, as such, may have little value, but that it may be put to high ends no one will deny. Lent may at least remind us that Christ does call us to something far higher and nobler than physical ease.

What a shame, cried St. Bernard, to be a delicate member of the Head crowned with thorns! Habitual temperance is more religious, and more wholesome, than recurrent austerities, but we have not attained to that grace. Normally, no doubt, the conditions most favorable to holiness result from the healthy interaction of body and soul, but life in our age is not normal. It is sodden with materialism and soured with cynicism. We may rightly reject the ascetic theory as a mistaken dualism, but there is another side to that truth. Nor must we forget that some of the loftiest and loveliest souls this earth has known used strange, stern means as helps to the holy life. A call for a week of self-denial in Paris some years ago was accompanied by an extract from a letter by Wilfred Monod running thus:

"How is it that Protestants have produced, on a man like Père Gratry, the impression which he formulates as follows? 'Protestantism is, in essence, the abolition of sacrifice. To abolish abstinence and fasting; to abolish the necessity of good works, effort, struggle, virtue; to shut up sacrifice in Jesus alone and

## THE CHALLENGE OF LENT

not let it pass to us; no more to say, as St. Paul did, I fill up what is wanting in the sufferings of Christ, but rather to say to Jesus on his cross, Suffer alone, O Lord—there is Protestantism.' "

Of course, sacrifice means more than doing without food, and it is going too far to say that Protestantism abolishes good works, effort, virtue; but the latter part of the statement is only too true. Both in theory and in practice we have shut up sacrifice in Jesus alone, holding that the merit of his suffering is imputed to us without our sharing his suffering. Not so St. Paul, whose passion it was to be a partaker of the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ, if so that he might win the high prize of the life eternal. St. Bernard, not less than Wesley, taught the goodly gospel of free grace, but he did not feel that it exempted him from a habit of austere living. Nor did Wesley, who fasted every Friday as long as he lived, and partook of the Holy Communion fifteen times in the last six weeks of his life, because he needed such aids in the practice of salvation. Neither of these masters of the spiritual life neglected the stern culture of the soul, as so many of us are wont to do, under the notion that the virtues are gifts and not trophies. Père Gratry was right in pointing this out as a grave defect in our teaching, and even more so in our practice, of the religious life.

If this is true of Protestantism in general, I fear it is still more true of that wing of it which calls itself, not always truly, liberal. Here, at least, I may be permitted

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

to speak frankly and to the point, applying my words more severely to myself than to any other. If I allow myself to be called a liberal Christian, it is not because I like defining my Christianity by an adjective—for I do not. But I somehow got the idea that this movement meant that a man is free to be a Christian, not that he holds his Christianity loosely, if not lightly. It had come to me that a liberal is one who has the same charity toward the past as toward the present, and is as willing to listen to St. Bernard as to Bernard Shaw. At any rate, it had been told me that the liberal pulpit rejected certain dogmas about Christ, and I thought that was because it wanted Christ brought nearer to us—with the demand which I knew would plague me with an unsatisfiable passion to be more like him. Some of us thought it was discontented with doctrines of the Atonement, because it wanted the reality—that we are called to be crucified with Christ, that he may rise in us. We thought it held the gospel of salvation which bids a man be willing to stand naked before the Awful Holiness, seeking “purity rather than peace,” as Newman made his motto. Were we mistaken? If so, then liberalism shall know me no longer, for who teaches an easy gospel teaches a gospel of perdition, whose end is death.

This is true, whatever else be false—that following Christ is a great adventure, and it means that we must take up a cross and bear it. Much as we may admire modern life, with many of the ideals of this indulgent age there can be no compromise, if we are to be followers of the Master. What fills me with a deep dis-

## THE CHALLENGE OF LENT

quiet about our Christianity today, both liberal and orthodox, is that it is so harmless. It is so tame, so timid, so tepid—a kind of glorified lollipop. Even if we apply it to social questions, as we talk so much of doing, there will be little result unless it has more power in it than it has now. It behooves us to think of the reality and ministry of our religion as we look toward the Passion of Him who, being rich, became poor, and was a friend of the lowly and forlorn. Lent evokes such thoughts, and it is therefore that we should keep it and wisely use it, doubly so in an age when "Whirl is King" and noise is terrifying, lest as the Wages of Hurry we lose our souls.

Alas, instead of being a period of inner discipline, Lent has become a relief from the dizzy social whirl; a time of moral manicuring! Penitence? For a few devout souls, yes; but for the mass of church folk it is little more than a form. No doubt we need to deal with the little gray sins which eat away our peace; but is there to be no prayer and fasting for the dark social sins which make human life a hell? No broken and contrite heart for the sin of war, which desolates humanity and leaves trails of skeletons across the earth? No repentance for racial rancor, and the bigotry which blinds us to brotherhood? No sackcloth and ashes for the sin of schism which divides the church and makes it impotent; for pettiness of soul, for our Pickwickian talk about unity? No bitter sorrow that the Gospel of Jesus has become in our hands a religion of easy edification rather than of daring moral adventure; jam, not dynamite? Yet, if we look into our own hearts we shall find

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

the key to the chaos, and why the world is so awry, since the social scene is our own lives writ large. O my soul, remember!

For one thing, Lent brings up the whole question as to the relation of the life of the body to the life of the spirit. Such a question cannot be discussed here at length, but it is a far-reaching one and may be hinted at. It is good common sense, as well as wise Platonic philosophy, that he who devotes himself to his appetites will have thoughts wingless and alien to the sky. Think of the fasting how you will, "a stuffed body cannot see clearly," as the old axiom assures us. Much less can it see the invisible things which ask for close and deep thinking. Asceticism, in its true sense, is simply a disciplined effort to gain an end, nothing more. Every man, if he has any ideal of any sort, is more or less an ascetic whether he knows it or not. That is, he begins, if he be wise, by cutting off what is incompatible with attainment. Thus an athlete goes into training, and by renunciation, by obeying rigid rules, makes his muscles strong and his nerves firm—the early Christians called themselves "spiritual athletes." Thus a man of affairs foregoes many pleasures to win the prize he aims at. Lent is a period of training for the soul, in behalf of a deeper insight, a fearless self-examination, and a better ordered inner life.

As such it is not beyond the reach of the most flaccid of us, since neither our bodies nor our wills are as finely tempered instruments as they ought to be. William James, my honored and dear teacher, urged men to keep alive in them the "faculty of effort," by doing

## THE CHALLENGE OF LENT

each day something for no other reason than that they would rather not do it. By such renunciations, he said, we attain a twofold end: we strengthen a habit of self-control, and we prepare ourselves to stand when the hour of dire need draws near, lest it find us unnerved and untrained to stand the test. In one of his letters to his children, Gladstone urged them to "put habit on the side of the spiritual life," and his wisdom was born of his own experience, as we know from the story of his life. Certain it is that a man inured to habits of concentrated attention, energetic volition, and self-denial will be unshaken, while his softer fellows fall. "A good will is the substance of all perfection," said the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*; and he added:

"Silence is not God, nor speaking; fasting is not God, nor eating; loneliness, nor company; nor yet any of all the other two such contraries. He is hidden between them, and may be found only by love of thine heart. He may not be known by reason, nor concluded by understanding; but He may be loved and chosen by the true loving will. Such a blind shot with the sharp dart of longing love may never miss the mark, the which is God. Look that nothing live in thy working mind but a naked intent stretching into the divine."

For another thing, Lent suggests most eloquently the need and value of some definite method for the culture of the inner life. Here is the great defect of our

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

age. No wonder so few of us ever get beyond the native and instinctive religion which is an endowment, and cannot be shaken off. In other things we have method, system, discipline, technique. No lawyer tries to practice at haphazard, with no regard for the decisions of courts or the masters of the law. Yet that is what we do in our life of faith. Not many of us know even the names of the great religious masterpieces—those pastures of the soul, so rich in beauty and wisdom. What a treasure of insight and experience, what noble companionship, what high leadership—and yet it is left unused. Volumes could not tell the folly of this neglect of the arts and offices of the soul whereby spiritual reality is made real. The wonder is not that we have misgivings, but that we have any faith at all, so little care do we take to keep it alive in our hearts.

Here again let me speak frankly, not to hurt, but, if it may be, to help. Some of us, women for the most part, take up with the cult of the esoteric or of some other sort, and spend some time each day reading its books. This is a start in the right direction—but such books, mere rubbish and hodgepodge, bereft of beauty, devoid of insight, with never a glint of genius! Suppose one should study art in that manner. Suppose one should leave out of account Angelo, Rembrandt and Raphael, and take up with some poor dauber. That would not be more pathetic than what some restless, troubled minds are doing. They have never employed methods in studying the great Christian religion, but must follow some wandering marsh-light. What a spectacle! If anyone wishes an inspiring optimism, radiant

## THE CHALLENGE OF LENT

and serene, let him go to Emerson who had authentic genius and power. Better still, let him devote the hours wasted on poor scribblers to the book that shows us, as in a mirror, what we are, and what we ought to be.

Then, too, Lent asks us to look into our own hearts and face what we find there, though it may make us shudder. One of our comfortable essayists said the other day that people in our day are not troubling about their sins. That is only too true; and it might be very well but for the fact that their sins will never cease to trouble them. With what terrible intensity of insight Ibsen has made us see that sin, no matter how it is excused or hidden, troubles not only ourselves but those yet unborn—ghastly *Ghosts* that will not down. If a great outside teacher, who can hardly be said to have had any faith in God, drives this fact home to men, surely the pulpit is remiss when it does not emphasize it. There were with us only a few years ago two such teachers of the very first order, Ibsen and Tolstoi. Now they are both gone, and there is no other who comes within sight of them.

Whatever else may be said of Ibsen, he was one of the greatest rulers and interpreters of the human spirit. So long as men dare to see life as it is, he will be read. He tore away ruthlessly the masks and veils with which men hide the fact of sin in the heart, and made us view with uncovered eyes the uncovered horror. He showed the insecurity and ultimate impossibility of any life that is founded upon a lie. It cannot stand. It is a house built upon the sand. Further, this stern teacher goes down into the dim depths of the soul and finds that sin

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

exists there, and that while men spend much time in cloaking it, it never can finally be hidden. What a tonic he is, after reading the rosewater theology of our day, which either ignores sin or seeks to disinfect it with an easy-going optimism.

Not so Ibsen. He preaches sin as a terrific reality, and he knows the agony of its inner wound—but, alas! he has no hope that it can be cleansed away. Confession he knows, but not the music of the gospel fact of forgiveness and healing. He preaches as few have ever preached the truth—

Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone—

and there he stops, as so much of the preaching of our time does. He sees no hope save in death, and that is why in six of his ten plays men and women invoke death by their own hands. Like all really profound thinkers, he saw the great fact of sacrifice, and especially the free sacrifice of the innocent for the guilty. Yet, sadly enough, he did not see the meaning of the Great Sacrifice, and so go on to finish the lines—

Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Has the gospel of our age lost the rhythm of that line? If so, however liberal it may be, however brilliant, it is no Gospel at all.

When the thoughts of men are turned toward the cross, let us look into our hearts in the light of the life and sacrifice of Jesus. God of mercy! what vile and slimy things a man finds in his heart when he sees it as

## THE CHALLENGE OF LENT

it is, in that soft, sure, penetrating light! He sees all that Ibsen saw, and more too. How his respectability vanishes! How his towering vanity comes tumbling down into the dust! Yet it is a kindly light, not only pure but purifying, with health and healing in its rays. It shows a great horror, but it gives us a great hope. Once a year, at the least, a man should examine the house of his heart and see what kind of spirit lives there—and that is the meaning of Lent. It demands that we fling away the spectacles of pretense, and face our souls in the light.

Such a meeting with his own soul is good for a man, whether he be in the pulpit or the pew. It helps him to see things as they really are—himself included, if so he may bestir himself to be other and better than he is. More than all, it induces a true humility of spirit, which is the beginning of wisdom and of righteousness. With me, the question is how to live before death so as to be worthy to live after it. Often it is a matter of grave doubt with me whether it is worth while to continue the experiment of such a life as mine. Until it is nobler and more Christlike than it is, that doubt must remain at once a perplexity and a provocation to effort.

It is good to be last, not first,  
Pending the present distress;  
It is good to hunger and thirst,  
So it be for righteousness.

It is good to spend and be spent,  
It is good to watch and to pray;  
Life and Death make a goodly Lent,  
So it lead to Easter Day.



# The Immortal Life



*From a volume entitled "If I Had Only One Sermon to Preach on Immortality"; edited by W. L. Stidger; used by permission of Harper and Brothers.*

## THE IMMORTAL LIFE

*Jesus said unto her, I am the Resurrection, and the Life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?*

—John 11:25, 26.



GAIN THE TIDE OF ETERNITY, BY MEN CALLED TIME, HAS BROUGHT US TO THE DAY OF ALL DAYS THE BEST, THE CREST AND CROWN OF the Christian Year: the Day of Eternal Life. The sweet order of Easter Day is blended with a beautiful confusion, in which the mysteries of religion are mixed with the mysteries of nature; and that is as it should be, because it is the day of the Cosmic Christ—the mighty Lord of Life and Death and all that lies between and beyond.

Out of a red sunset an Oriental poet once saw a friend riding over the desert toward his tent, wrapped in glory like a heavenly halo, and the poet exclaimed, "Glory to the Almighty, the sun has risen in the West!" Out of the crimson sunset on Good Friday, its horror and its heroism, the Risen Christ comes riding in majesty today, the best Friend of the human heart, and

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

we cry out, "Glory to the Almighty, the sun has risen in the West!"

Out of death comes Life; out of agony comes joy; out of defeat, victory; out of sunset, dawn. Where we had least hope of sunrise, "the Son of Righteousness arises with healing in His wings," in fulfillment of his own tremendous words:

*"I am the Resurrection, and the Life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"*

How often, alas, we have heard those words as a part of the Office of the Burial of the Dead; and it was so I first heard them as a tiny lad when my father was buried. Clinging to the hand of my little mother, on that snowy day I looked for the first time into an open grave, and it seemed that everything was lost—as if the bottom had dropped out of life. Then the kindly old country preacher began the service: "I am the Resurrection, and the Life,"—never shall I forget the thrill of those words! It was as if a great, gentle Hand, stronger than the hand of man and more tender than the hand of woman, had been put forth from the unseen to help and heal—from that day to this I have loved Jesus to distraction! Forty-six years later I stood on the same spot, when the little mother whose hand I held in days that come not back was laid away; and again the words, "I am the Resurrection, and the Life," spoke to me out

## THE IMMORTAL LIFE

of the depths of death—nay, out of the heart of God!—and there was sunrise in the west!

Of all expositions of those words the noblest is the picture, by Browning, of the death of St. John the Evangelist of Love, the last of the glorious company of the Apostles, and the only one to die a natural death. The little knot of disciples stood around watching the great head sink lower and yet lower, until at last the flame of life flickered, and, as it seemed, went out. Loneliness, like a cold, crawling sea mist, filled their hearts, for there was no one left who had seen the face of Jesus; no one who could say, "I heard his voice,"—and how much had been left untold! Desperately the little group tried to coax back a tiny spark of life, but in vain, till a lad ran for a copy of the Gospel, found the page, and read, "I am the Resurrection, and the Life." Hearing the Voice of his Lord, the seemingly dead man sat up and poured out his soul in one last luminous talk.

What stupendous words, "I am the Resurrection, and the Life," and how utterly empty and unreal, if not wildly insane, upon the lips of the gentle, winsome humanitarian Christ who, however heroic and fascinating, is only one of ourselves—purer, braver, more unearthly—yet guessing at the riddle of life as we have to do, knowing nothing certainly of his own destiny or ours, himself a victim of muddy, all-devouring Death, which seems to divide divinity with God. No! No! Here speaks the Master of Life and Death, the Lord of worlds other than this orb of dust, the Revealer of the meaning of life, a Voice out of the heart of things—a

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

Voice not simply of comfort, but of command. Here shines a Light that never was on sea or land, fairer than the prophet-vision, brighter than the poet-dream. Nevertheless, this Being who towers so far above us is still so close to our humanity, his whole life so entwined with our piteous, passionate, and pathetic life on earth, that we somehow feel that what is true of him is in some degree true, potentially, of ourselves. How these two truths can be united may be hard to know—save in a paradox profounder than thought—but they are equally vivid, equally valid, and equally blessed in our historic Christian faith; and to lose either truth is to lose the other. Here, to say it once more, is the highest reach of holiness in man answered by a Voice older than the earth and deeper than death:

*Before Abraham was, I am*—life endless at both ends, moving with a higher rhythm, stretching away into unfathomable depths and distances; one vast Life that lives and cannot die, gathering all our broken lights into its eternal radiance.

*I am the Light of the World*—the sun is up; shadows of death and dark fatality flee away; blind thoughts we know not nor can name are forgotten like fear in the night. It is daybreak; life everywhere is radiant—earth is a valley with a lark-song over it.

*I am the Way*—the path marked out for the soul; the way without which there is no going, to lose which is to wander in a wilderness, or end in a blind alley; the Way which, if we follow it faithfully, shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

*I am the Truth*—the truth about life and death, which

## THE IMMORTAL LIFE

breaks through language and escapes; the truth that makes all other truth true; nay, more, the Truth that can never be uttered, but must be acted, incarnated; the truth that sets life to music.

*I am the Life*—the Life that interprets life; no mere story of life, but Life itself intense, creative, palpitating, prophetic; life in a new dimension, with a new radiance, overflowing, sweeping dim death away as in a flood of light and power and joy.

*I am the Good Shepherd*—the Shepherd of ages and journeying generations, whose heart aches with compassion for the multitudes who wander far, seeking without finding; the mighty Shepherd in whose bosom the lambs find a haven and a home.

*I am the Door*—the Door out of night into dawn; the Door into Another Room in the House not made with hands, “our dwelling place in all generations”; the sheltering home of all souls, however far-wandering, where we shall see “that one Face” and be satisfied. “Behold, I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it.”

*I am the Resurrection, and the Life*—death is abolished, as the radio abolishes distance; it no longer exists, save as a cloud-shadow wandering across the human valley. “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid,”—death is other than we think or fear.

*Behold, I am alive for evermore*—the word of One who has death behind him, never to face it again—a thing left below, defeated and outsped—having passed through its shadow, making a path of light “which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

Now, consider. No one else has ever spoken such words to humanity; no one can do it. Never once does Jesus say, "I believe," as we must needs do, praying help for our unbelief. No. "*I am* the Resurrection, and the Life"—it is not merely an anthem of affirmation; it is a revelation of another order, rhythm and cadence of life. He does not argue; he unveils the truth. He does not promise immortality in some dim, far time beyond; he illumines it, bringing both "life and immortality to light." It is not only a prophecy but a possession—such a reversal of faith, such a transvaluation of values as baffles thought and bewilders imagination. "*I am the Resurrection*": God is here, Eternity is now, Death is nothing to the soul—it is a staggering truth, so vast that our minds seem unable to grasp and hold it. Once we do grasp it, once we do lay it to heart and know its power, then we know the meaning of the words, "Behold, I make all things new." Life everyway is infinite; the sky begins at the top of the ground. O my soul, remember, consider, and rejoice in God thy Saviour!

Here is the song of the immortal life, breaking in upon our broken days and years, gathering our fugitive and fragmentary lives into its sovereign harmony, if we have ears to hear and hearts to heed and understand. Slowly, upon our dim eyes, blinded by dusty death, there dawns the vision of a Spiritual Order in which all the holy things of life—its higher values, its haunting prophecies—have their source, sanction, security, and satisfaction. To the reality of that realm all the noblest creative life of humanity bears witness—dimly or clearly—and from it the purest souls of the race

## THE IMMORTAL LIFE

have drawn inward sustaining. Of that Order "the Lord of all Good Life" was and is a citizen; its laws were revealed in his life; its meaning spoke in his words—pitched not in the past nor in the future, but in "the mystic tense";—its light became incandescent in his personality. By its sovereign power he was Master of disease, discord, and dark fatality—nay, more, of Life and Time and Death; in its fellowship he still lives and serves humanity, a thousand times more alive than in the days of his flesh. By the Power of Spirit his swift and gentle years moved with the lilt of a lyric, and even the tragedy of his death—in which he faced the worst and found the best—became the epic of the life everlasting.

As Dante said, Jesus taught us "how to make our lives eternal," and if we learn his secret we shall know neither fret nor fear. In prayer, in glad obedience, in high adventure—giving all, daring all—he drew the fullness of God into his life, fulfilling what others had dreamed. By the wonder of his personality he released a new power in human life—"the power of an endless life"—power over sin, over sorrow, over brute matter and black despair. Here lies the secret of social stability and nobility, no less than of triumphant character. Half a life ago Dostoievski foretold the orgy of modern Russia—anarchy running mad and running red—when, in *The Possessed*, one of his characters cries out, prophetically:

"Listen, I've reckoned them all up; a teacher who laughs with children at their

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

God is on our side. The juries who acquit every criminal are ours. Among officials and literary men we have lots, lots, and they don't know it themselves. Do you know how many we shall catch with little, ready-made ideas? The Russian God has already been vanquished with cheap vodka. The peasants are drunk, the churches are empty. Oh, this generation has only to grow up. Ah, what a pity there is no proletariat. But there will be, there will be; we are going that way."

What happened in Russia will happen among us, when we let the altar fires of our fathers go out and our faith fail. All the dear interests and institutions of humanity have their basis in the eternal life, else they cannot abide. Our human world is kept in place and urged along its orbit by unseen forces. Thence come those impulses to progress, those insights and aspirations, which impel man to vaster issues—they are the pressure upon him of the endless life. Liberty, justice, love, truth are things of the eternal life, without which customs are cobwebs and laws are ropes of sand. Toward the end of his life Dostoievski divided the race into two classes, those who know the eternal life and those who do not, and the fate of civilization, he said, will rest with those who are citizens of eternity. The power of an endless life is thus the creative and constructive force of humanity, and when it is lost society becomes a pig-sty.

Here, no less, is the secret of spiritual character and

## THE IMMORTAL LIFE

personality, the two loveliest flowers grown in these short days of sun and frost. Only recently a great physician said that subconscious health cannot be obtained in one who has lost faith in immortality. Without it the noblest powers of the soul are inhibited, its finest instincts are frustrated, having no happy release and no promise of fulfillment. When we know the Eternal Life, all doors are open and the great aspirations of the heart take wings. The impingement of Eternity upon us gives to the moral sense an august authority, and makes religion not a dogma, but an Eternal Communion. Life everywhere grows in dignity, meaning, worth and grace when it is lived in the fellowship of eternal things. The Power of an Endless Life—it is the life of faith, of love, of fellowship, of joy. It makes a man stand up like a tower, four-square to all the winds of the world, a defense to the weak or the weary. It is one with all dear friendships, with every tender tie which unites us with those nearest to us, with every bond of sympathy binding us to humanity—aye, with those whom we have loved and lost awhile.

What life really is, what it prophesies, what it may actually become even here on earth—transfiguring all “our fleshly dress with bright shoots of everlastingness”—is shown us in the life of Jesus; by the truth he taught, and still more by his personality. He was so aglow with the power and joy of life, so in tune with its vivid, creative urge and insight, that his words seem to have a life of their own, and grow. He was a spiritual biologist who thought of religion in terms of life—not of life in terms of religion—and he hardly used the

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

word death at all; since death is not an event but a tendency, and true life is the death of death. By his death Jesus gave life to his religion, and by his resurrection he made religion a life, even the Eternal Life in time, free, radiant, abundant, creative, victorious—a quest, a conquest, a consecration.

In literature there is an exalted zone of song wherein if a man step his footfall echoes forever, defying time and change and death: and thus the echo of an hour of prayer among the Judean hills, or a lyric sung at a Greek festival, becomes a part of the eternal speech of mankind. Just so, there is in the life of the spirit a level of loyalty, of luminous lucidity, of immaculate perception, of all-giving love, which joins the mortal to the immortal, and death is seen to be only the shadow of life as it spreads its wings for flight; only a dark room in which life changes its robe and marches on. Others enter that realm, briefly, in rare hours of insight and understanding, when the mood is pure and the vision is clear; but Jesus lived in it, obeyed its laws, unveiled its reality and revealed its emancipating truth. Hence the strange, searching, haunting, healing quality of his words, which seem like birds let loose from a region above our reach of which we are dimly aware, and toward which both wisdom and faith point. Hence, too, the refrain that echoes through his teaching: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

From that radiant realm, in the rhythm of its profound and transcendent experience of God, Jesus spoke the words, *I am the Resurrection, and the Life.* Such

## THE IMMORTAL LIFE

words are notes in an eternal world-song, a Divine Symphony which began when the morning stars sang together over a new-born earth, and which runs through all things. It is the Song of Life itself, underflowing all the tumult and tragedy of time, upbearing the life and death of humanity—its sins and woes, its griefs and heartaches—and lifting all at last into the rhythm and cadence of an Eternal Life; an august undertone prophetic of a final harmony of all things with God. All religions, all philosophies are but broken echoes of one everlasting music, prose versions of a Divine Poetry singing even “in the mud and scum of things,”—an all-sustaining, undefeatable melody:

It singeth low in every heart,  
We hear it each and all.

At last, rising above all discord and seeming defeat, it will break in triumphant anthems of adoration upon the throne of God, proclaiming that “life is ever lord of death and love can never lose its own.” Believest thou this?

By the same token, if we would know the power of an endless life, defeating death and dull dismay, it must be by contact and fellowship with the Lord of Life. Ever the path lies at our feet, if we follow on to realize the life that is triumphant, and the road mounts steadily: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” For Thou, O God, art Life, Thou art Reality, and Thou art our Father.

## THINGS I KNOW IN RELIGION

Safe in the care of heavenly powers,  
The good we dreamed but might not do,  
Lost beauty magically new,  
Shall spring as surely as the flowers  
When, 'mid the sobbing of the rain,  
The heart of April beats again.

Celestial spirit that doth roll  
The heart's sepulchral stone away,  
Be this our resurrection day,  
The singing Easter of the Soul:  
O gentle Master of the Wise,  
Teach me to say, "I will arise!"











UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY



124 814

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY